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Fifty-third Session

Official Records

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New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Address by Mr. James Michel, Vice-President of the Seychelles

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Seychelles.

Mr. James Michel, Vice-President of the Seychelles, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Vice-President of the Seychelles, Mr. James Michel, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Michel (Seychelles): Seychelles is pleased to see Mr. Opertti at the helm of this session of the General Assembly. We welcome the experience, expertise and skills which he brings to our deliberations. Likewise, we wish to express our appreciation to his predecessor for his outstanding contribution and leadership during the fifty-second session.

Our felicitations also go to the Secretary-General for spearheading courageous and innovative reforms aimed at revitalizing the United Nations at the threshold of the new millennium.

We support the measures being undertaken to make the United Nations more efficient and effective, capable of making optimal use of its resources. My delegation believes that development ought to be central to the renewed United Nations agenda. For this reason, we hold that a larger proportion of United Nations resources should be allocated to development, particularly to meet the growing and imperious needs of the developing countries. It is only in so doing that the objective of attaining a "dividend for development" can be attained.

Reform of the United Nations cannot be complete without the reform of its main organ responsible for peace and security: the Security Council. We are all agreed on this, but we differ on how to go about it. Yet there is no doubt that the Security Council should be transformed into a democratic and representative organ, reflecting both its universal character and present-day realities, and taking into consideration the need for balanced representation in its membership.

Many options have been mooted. But there are still major obstacles to overcome if we are to agree on the composition of the enlarged Council, the creation of new permanent seats and the question of the veto right for both current and prospective members. We need to move and harmonize positions in order to arrive at a generally acceptable solution. And in so doing we must reckon with the fact that the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America are and will be major stakeholders in the formulation of the international power structure of the twenty-first century.

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Equally important for my delegation is that the reform package should encompass the enhancement of the General Assembly as the supreme policy-making organ of the United Nations. It is only through the reinforcement of the Assembly's role and mandate that we can successfully tackle some of the most pressing issues facing humanity, not least the process of globalization. Globalization has brought prosperity to some. However, in this new global village, many of its inhabitants — especially those in its slums — face the prospect of further impoverishment and marginalization. For them, the spectre of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, inadequate shelter and disease is a constant reality. It is their daily lot. It flouts human dignity. No one should have to live and die in poverty. This is not how we envisage the destiny of the greater part of humankind in the twenty-first century.

So the greatest challenge facing us, the United Nations, is the eradication of the slums of our global village. If we want to get rid of the scourge of poverty, we need to redress the present imbalances. We need to ensure that all countries of the world benefit from the effects of globalization.

Our basic contention — and I do not think that it is too much to ask for — is that we should be able to increase our share in the global economy, be it through trade or through the mobilization of foreign direct investment. As small developing economies, we face the enormous challenge of building our export and institutional capacities to allow us to assume our place in this fiercely competitive global environment.

If we are to attract investments, improve product quality, meet standards — in short, compete effectively and grasp the opportunities presented by the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements — then it is imperative that the international community recognize the need to grant us adequate transitional support.

It is in this context that my delegation appeals to the European Union to accept the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of States' request for an extension of trade preferences under a WTO waiver for a protracted period of time, within the framework of the successor agreement to the Lomé IV Convention. Genuine cooperation should take cognizance of the special development need of weaker and vulnerable partners to adjust to the demands of competitiveness. We need time to allow a transitional period of preparation and adjustment. And we need to do so under fair conditions.

We small island developing States are the weaker and more vulnerable members of the international community. It is a well-established fact. But whilst momentum has been created for the recognition of our special characteristics and constraints, it is somewhat disappointing to note that avowed intentions have yet to be translated into action. How are we to interpret this apparent inertia in the application of the so-called vulnerability index? How are we to interpret this apparent indifference to the problems we face, especially in relation to security, sustainable development and environmental protection?

Vulnerability has taught us in the Seychelles a few lessons, though. Whilst our voice is little heard in this forum, whenever we are asked about our role on the world stage our response generally reveals an impressive scoresheet in such areas as conservation of the environment and an equally ambitious vision of our place in the world. We continue to work very hard to ensure that the development necessary to give our people a high degree of social well-being does not affect the "last sanctuary on Earth", as we call ourselves.

"Environment" for us is not a fashion statement. We do not intend to give any lessons, but we certainly intend to be the conscience of the world. Whilst others, infinitely more powerful and developed than we are, pollute and spoil, we preserve and protect. We have set aside some 45 per cent of our national territory for the protection of nature. And we have offered to the international community two of its most precious natural treasures as World Heritage Sites.

But all this has a cost. We bear the brunt of it, conscious of our responsibility to future generations, conscious that planet Earth is our common heritage. Ours, though, is a shared responsibility, requiring global solutions to a global problem. And the solution is to be found not in rhetoric, but in action. Therefore, we expect the industrialized nations to pay less lip service to environmental protection. We expect them to be accountable and to meet their Kyoto commitments. Above all, we expect them to get their act together and clean up the mess we are all in.

Vulnerability has also taught us to live in racial harmony, to make ours the ideals for which the United Nations stands for. The force of our social cohesion lies in our racial diversity. Africans, Asians and Europeans have forged our nation, resulting in a happy marriage of races that has led to an eclectic population of 79,000

people living in harmony and tolerance. When we see what goes on around us — wars, acts of wanton terrorism and destruction, savagery and barbarism — all in the name of some insane ideology, religious, racial or political, we fail to comprehend. We fail to understand, perhaps because we have learned to live together as one nation, regardless of racial origin or political or religious conviction.

We try very hard to mitigate the effects of our vulnerability. If we have achieved some degree of success, it is through the prudent and often painstaking management of our natural resources. It is also through the judicious use of international aid and grants that we have received over the years. We have not wasted a cent of what has been awarded to us. We have managed overseas development assistance by creating a beneficial multiplier effect that has trickled down into all spheres and levels of our national development. Unfortunately, the logic and unwritten laws of international cooperation will have it that we have become victims of this very prudent use of aid. We seem to have worked ourselves off the list of nations that qualify for such help.

In this interdependent world of ours, the ramifications of globalization have proved that the world order has no frontiers. Solutions to the challenges of the new international order are to be sought through international solidarity and cooperation, through the vehicle of multilateralism. This presupposes that every member of the international community should enjoy peace and security. Unfortunately, too many conflict situations persist, negating economic growth and social progress. The African continent has been disproportionately afflicted by intra-State and inter-State conflicts.

At the special meeting of the Security Council on Africa in April this year, we urged the international community to put its full weight behind African peace initiatives, but also to reinforce the institutional and operational capacity of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa. Finding durable solutions to our problems in Africa requires a concerted and integrated approach by the international community if we want to make the African renaissance a reality in an era of global solidarity and partnership.

Speaking of peace and security, we cannot but empathize with a fellow small island State — Cyprus — with which we are sentimentally bound in a common destiny. The division of the island has persisted for too long. We cannot allow it to continue as a fait accompli. Nor can we condone the presence of foreign troops there. Cyprus is a unitary, sovereign State whose intercommunal problems can only be resolved on the basis of Security Council resolutions.

In a separate but related context, we note with regret the continuing tension in Greek-Turkish relations. My country, like all peace-loving nations, would like to see Greece and Turkey establish good-neighbourly relations based on international law and treaties, as well as on the basis of the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Differences are bound to remain, but these can be resolved within mechanisms available in international law, in particular, through the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. We urge Turkey to accept the Court's jurisdiction.

We are conscious of the inequalities and double standards which prevail throughout the world. The rules of the game, more often than not, are not tipped in favour of the smallest among us. Indeed, relations between nations give the lie to the statement that we are all equal. This is the reality of things. We do not say that we necessarily accept the status quo. But we have learned to live with it. Neither do we accept that squalor, injustice and poverty should be the norms guiding relations between human beings in the next millennium.

So, in recognizing our own shortcomings and failures, we also recognize that humankind is presented with a unique opportunity to right the wrongs and injustices that it has perpetrated.

We are also presented with a unique opportunity to make our planet, our only home, a better, cleaner and safer place to live. We can do so through a proactive United Nations. It is not a perfect institution. But it is the only institution which represents the collective conscience of humanity. It represents the unique, indispensable forum for shared international responsibilities and global issues which affect the entire community of nations.

The United Nations remains our greatest hope for justice, peace, security and development. It remains our only hope for a more compassionate world.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the Vice-President of the Seychelles for the statement he has just made.

Mr. James Michel, Vice-President of the Seychelles, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency the Honourable Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania, whom I invite to address the Assembly.

Mr. Kikwete (United Republic of Tanzania): On behalf of the delegation of the United Republic of Tanzania, and on my own behalf, allow me to extend to Mr. Didier Opertti our sincere congratulations on his unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. To his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, I should like to convey our deep appreciation for the exemplary manner in which he presided over the last session.

My delegation also wishes to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General for the dedication he has demonstrated in guiding our Organization through one of its most challenging periods, as we seek to reform and revitalize it and to restore its focus on the economic, social and development agenda — the very heart of its mission.

The reform of the United Nations is a course we have set for ourselves. Indeed, the reform we desire cannot be an end in itself; rather, it is a means to better enable our Organization to carry out its mission efficiently and more effectively. Therefore, our efforts must be directed not only at placing the development problems we face on the global agenda, but also at strengthening the concrete contribution of the United Nations in the development field and resisting any attempts at withdrawal in this area. For it is in the area of development that the challenge to the United Nations is most critical, and it is for this reason that we believe the Organization should continue to be involved, and its role be strengthened.

My delegation strongly shares the general desire of Member States to strengthen the role of the Security Council, as well as to review its composition. We also share disappointment about the degree of progress we have been able to achieve so far. However, progress on this matter can only be made after we reach agreement on the fundamental principles involved and how we can move together in the direction of implementing that agreement.

Tanzania, and indeed Africa, has made its position clear: that we desire an expanded, representative and democratized Security Council in which each Member is given a rightful role to play. Africa, as the largest group, demands and deserves no fewer than two permanent seats in an appropriately expanded Council. At the moment, we must place the emphasis on reaching agreement on the principle and extent of expanding the Council, and not elsewhere.

An effective United Nations is a matter of as much great concern to my country as it is to all Member States. The effectiveness of our Organization depends, to a considerable extent, on its being financially stable. It is sad that the financial situation of our Organization has become increasingly precarious. Cash balances continue to be dangerously low, the timing and amount of inflows continue to be unpredictable, and the Organization is unable to meet its commitments on time. In other words, a bad financial situation has persisted and become increasingly rigid. We are all aware of the fact that this difficult financial situation has been brought about and is being exacerbated by the non-payment of outstanding assessed contributions on the part of some Member States, especially the major contributor, for reasons of political expediency. We urge them to pay on time, in full and without qualification.

On 7 August this year, the American embassy in my country was the target of a terrorist bombing deliberately planned and callously executed to cause maximum damage. The attack in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, claimed the lives of 10 innocent and unsuspecting Tanzanians, injured over 70 people and caused extensive damage to property. A similar and almost simultaneous bombing of the American embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, brought about far greater loss of life and destruction of property.

In the wake of the attack, many friends here sent us messages of condolence and solidarity. Some of them extended financial and material support to help us meet the requirements of treating the victims of the bombing, as well as to help with the investigations. I would like to reiterate the gratitude of the people and Government of Tanzania to all those Governments, organizations and individuals who have expressed solidarity with us or extended material support following that tragic terrorist bombing. Of particular mention here are the people and Government of the United States of America, who extended medical support and assisted in the investigations through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Terrorism is a heinous crime against humanity. It is cruel, indiscriminate and, above all, wanton and senseless. Whatever cause may have prompted the perpetrators to resort to it, we do not believe that it is any way justifiable. It is the most rational way neither of

expressing one's indignation, nor of dealing with one's so-called enemy. Instead, from the moral and political standpoint, acts of terrorism lead to the alienation of the perpetrators, incite hatred and so, deservedly, earn them outrage and condemnation. Invariably, terrorism reduces the number of sympathizers and adds to the list of opponents. It is a worthless recourse — indeed, a misadventure which common sense demands to be abandoned now.

The bombings brought home a number of realities, namely, that terrorism is a global problem and that no country is safe from its menace. It also reminded us that, just as terrorism has a global reach, so must the fight against it be concerted and global. The world must therefore make it quite clear to the perpetrators of these heinous crimes that terrorism will be answered with swift and decisive action to bring those responsible to justice and that they will find no solace or refuge anywhere.

Thanks to international cooperation and partnership, the investigations into those terrorist bombings are on course and arrests have been made. In fact, two people have already appeared in court in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, charged with committing acts of terrorism and murder, thanks to cooperation between Tanzanian investigators, the FBI and several other countries and organizations. We need to strengthen that cooperation in order to bring all of those responsible to justice and ensure that terrorism is comprehensively dealt with. In this regard, we should strengthen international legal regimes against terrorism.

Three months ago in June, world leaders met here in New York and addressed the world drug problem, another international criminal question which deserves global action. The objective was to commit themselves to fighting the demand for illicit drugs, the manufacture of psychotropic substances and the diversion of precursors within precise time-frames. The Political Declaration and the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction that world leaders adopted at the end of the special session were the first agreements ever aimed exclusively at examining individual and collective problems arising from drug abuse. Just like terrorism, drugs are an international menace which must be dealt with through global cooperation and partnership.

On 12 December this year, we shall be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary is a fitting occasion for all of us to look critically at our record in the protection and promotion of human rights. This is the time for us to ask ourselves whether our adherence to human rights agreements has made any difference to the way we observe human rights. This is the time for us to renew our commitment to all international instruments to which we are party by implementing the provisions of those agreements.

I wish I could preface my remarks on the Great Lakes region on a more positive note than I did last year. The situation in Burundi remains precarious, notwithstanding the holding of the negotiating process within the framework of the Arusha peace talks. We continue to receive refugees from Burundi, as the security situation inside the country has not improved appreciably. Yet, we are encouraged that the parties to the conflict continue to demonstrate the disposition to a pacific settlement and persist in dialogue. In a couple of weeks, a further round of negotiations will convene in Arusha, under the facilitation of Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, to thrash out the details of a settlement and strengthen the undertakings already entered into during the last round of talks.

We will continue to urge the parties to the conflict in Burundi along the path of dialogue in the full knowledge that Tanzania and, indeed, the region can only help. The onus of delivering peace and sustaining it rests squarely and solely on the people that country.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is very worrisome indeed. The conflict there, in both its internal and external contexts, threatens to throw that country and the region into prolonged anarchy and war unless it is arrested now. The region, particularly within the framework of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), has expended efforts aimed at securing a ceasefire in order to initiate a political process to bring the conflict to a peaceful end. This was the spirit of the Victoria Falls and Pretoria summits, as well as of the SADC summit in Mauritius only a couple of weeks ago. We are also appreciative of the efforts deployed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan during the Non-Aligned summit in Durban, South Africa, in the search for a speedy end to the hostilities and the beginning of a process of dialogue and negotiation.

My Government believes that anarchy and war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are not inevitable. They can be avoided provided all the parties demonstrate

a sense of realism and a willingness to work on a comprehensive settlement based on scrupulous respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that country; the principle of a peaceful settlement of the conflict; full respect for the rights of all the citizens of that country; and the consideration of the legitimate security concerns of the neighbouring countries.

My country will therefore continue, within this framework and in the context of the mandate given to it by the SADC summit meeting which took place in Mauritius recently, to urge all the parties involved to bring an immediate end to the hostilities and to facilitate the commencement of negotiations aimed at securing an understanding on the ceasefire and its monitoring, troop withdrawals and the internal dialogue, which is so critical to the long-term security, peace, stability and unity of that country. I urge the international community to support the regional efforts now under way to avert catastrophe in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My delegation is equally concerned about the Eritrea-Ethiopia border conflict, which has brought these two sister republics and fraternal peoples into a war which has already claimed many lives and huge damage to property. We continue to urge the two countries to exercise restraint and consider initiatives, particularly those of the OAU, aimed at diffusing tension and finding a peaceful solution to the border conflict.

These two countries, which have endured decades of conflict, know the destruction and pain which war can engender, and they owe it to themselves and to peace in Africa to ensure that nothing is done to aggravate the situation and reignite military confrontation. We also urge them to give mediation a chance. After all, it is in dialogue that both sides of the argument can be heard, and it is in dialogue that mechanisms for enduring peace can be negotiated and put in place.

The instability in the Great Lakes area continues to be the source of refugees in the region. Tanzania has hosted thousands of them, and it seems we will continue to do so because of the deterioration of the political situation in some countries. The exercise to repatriate refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo began in October last year and was proceeding well. By June this year, 48,658 Congolese refugees had been repatriated. There were 47,857 remaining, but the repatriation programme was going well.

However, with the outbreak of civil strife in the Congo, the exercise has stalled and new refugees are once again streaming into Tanzania. In the two months of the new conflict in that country, we have already received about 10,000 new refugees. As part of the international community and a responsible member of the United Nations, Tanzania will continue to meet its international obligation of hosting these refugees, and about 200,000 refugees more from Burundi. But we must confess that because of various circumstances, our perseverance is wearing out and our hospitality should not be considered open-ended.

While appealing for increased support and assistance for our country for hosting refugees, we call upon the international community to exert great efforts to deal with the root cause of the refugee problem. Many times before in this Assembly and other forums, the international community has spoken of and committed itself to helping the refugee-producing countries address the root cause of the displacements. I regret that this has remained an unfulfilled intention. I always wonder why there has been so much talk about it and little is being achieved.

Today, we see latent reluctance to engage those countries in sustained political dialogue requiring them to take responsibility for their refugee-generating policies. We see greater preparedness to rationalize their actions in the name of humanitarianism. At times the host country has been the object of undue pressure to make more concessions or even of unjustified blame and accusations. It is very frustrating indeed. This is not the way to assist refugee-producing countries to come to terms with their internal problems and spare others the unending burden of hosting refugees. We need to emphasize the closure of those factories which produce refugees, as we do meeting the needs of those innocent refugees who are the products.

It is in this light that I ask the Assembly and the international community to encourage the countries of the Great Lakes to resolve the underlying political conflicts of the region and to call for mechanisms for greater burden-sharing in a way that will ease strain on the resources of the countries which have borne the brunt of hosting refugees.

The peace process in Angola is, to our utmost regret, moving dangerously towards collapse. While the Lusaka Protocol may still be salvaged, we strongly condemn UNITA for its blatant violations of both the agreement and relevant Security Council resolutions. The

people of Angola need and deserve the peace they have been waiting for for so long. The international community must hold UNITA and its leadership responsible for their failure to fully implement their obligations under the Peace Accords, thus frustrating the successful outcome of the peace process. Tanzania will support any efforts by this Assembly which will ensure that peace obtains in Angola.

The search for a peaceful settlement in Somalia has not borne fruit yet. The country remains divided into sectors, each held by a warlord. We support the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), within the terms of the Sodore agreement, as well as those of the OAU Chairman and Secretary-General, in searching for a solution in Somalia. We support the efforts to hold a consultative meeting to bring together various groups of people, including individuals, businessmen and community groups, in order to get views and proposals in addition to those of political parties.

Another long-standing issue is the question of Western Sahara. We hope that the referendum will go ahead as planned on 7 December of this year. Tanzania calls on the United Nations to ensure that the preparations are well executed so that justice will prevail, especially in deciding who should vote in the referendum.

We regret that the situation in the Middle East continues to be characterized by tension and continued denial to the Palestinian people of their right to full self-determination and to a homeland of their own, due to the refusal by Israel to honour its obligations towards the peace process. The Israeli policy of territorial expansion, in utter violation of the letter and spirit of those commitments, stands to undermine the prospects for the permanent status negotiations leading to agreement for peace in the area. We call upon the Israeli Government to abandon its obstructionist policies and to resume dialogue. In this regard, my Government is encouraged by the high-level consultations which are currently taking place between the leaders of Palestine and Israel. We hope they will lead to overcoming the present impasse in the peace process.

My delegation has welcomed the recent breakthrough in the long-standing conflict between the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on the one hand, and the United States and the United Kingdom on the other, over the Lockerbie incident, which culminated in the adoption of Security Council resolution 1192 (1998). It remains our fervent hope that agreement will be reached soon on the trial arrangements so that the sanctions imposed upon Libya can be quickly lifted.

The Korean Peninsula remains an area of tension and unpredictability. We continue to believe that durable peace and eventual unification can be attained only through dialogue. We therefore urge the parties and the international community to support this course.

We welcome the agreement reached between the Governments of Portugal and Indonesia to address the question of East Timor. We urge the two Governments to expand the dialogue they have initiated so that the wishes of the East Timorese people can be fulfilled.

Africa is faced by a number of devastating conflicts. It accepts the primary responsibility for bringing them to an end and for elaborating mechanisms for enduring peace in the continent. It is in fulfilment of that responsibility that the OAU has taken a leading role in searching for solutions. This the organization has done in partnership with its subregional groups of countries and organizations, as was the case with Liberia, Sierra Leone and now in Burundi, Somalia, the Comoros and Lesotho, among others. My Government continues to believe in the centrality of the OAU in the search for solutions to African problems. At the same time, we also believe that where necessary, the OAU and the African continent deserve the support of the international community and of the United Nations in particular.

In this regard, once again wish to pay tribute to the Security Council for the initiative it took a year ago in having a regular ministerial debate on Africa, the result of which was the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. We applauded the Secretary-General for that report and we do so again today. We could not agree more with his observation that

> "it is the persistence of poverty that is impeding the full promise of peace for all of Africa's peoples. The alleviation of poverty must be the first aim of our efforts. Only then — only when prosperity and opportunity become real — will every citizen, young or old, man or woman, have a genuine and lasting stake in a peaceful future for Africa — politically, economically and socially."

Indeed, our illustrious Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has underscored two important facts here. One, that a poor man, a hungry man, has no peace. Two, only when prosperity and opportunity become real will Africa take its rightful place in the global economy. Africans, more than anyone else, recognize that they bear the

responsibility to move towards that noble objective. They need the support of the international community.

The President took the Chair.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which my country is privileged to host, has been working under challenging circumstances. During the past 12 months it has made commendable progress. Regrettably, more attention has been attracted by the difficulties it has had to confront than what it has achieved. My Government remains strongly committed to supporting the Tribunal. We are also keenly aware that, just as we have to play our part, the international community must also lend its firm support to the Tribunal to enable it to discharge its mandate and assist, as quickly as it should, in the healing process in Rwanda. The recent judgements by the Tribunal constitute a milestone towards that end. They are a landmark we should welcome and build on.

The adoption in Rome of the Statute for the International Criminal Court is a welcome step towards bridging a critical gap in both international criminal law and international humanitarian and human rights law. My delegation believes that the establishment of the Court will be a concrete assurance of our profound concern about respect for and protection of the humanity we all share. It represents an important assurance that individuals, whether as leaders or otherwise, will be accountable and therefore that impunity will not go unpunished. Indeed, the establishment of the Court will be a legacy of our commitment to the pursuit of justice, and could well go down as one of the most momentous decisions of the twentieth century.

It is in the context of the pursuit of justice that we must, however, mention what in our view is the most serious failure of the Rome Conference. At a time when some financial institutions are making, albeit belatedly, some form of reparation to the victims of the Nazi Holocaust, it is to be regretted that the attribution of some form of criminal responsibility to legal persons is a notion conspicuously absent from the Statute. To the extent that this was driven by considerations of corporate interest, it speaks about our lack of real commitment to justice, notwithstanding any measure of concern and grief we may pretend to extend to victims.

Disarmament continues to be an important issue for my country. The Treaty of Pelindaba establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa is testament to the resolve of Africa to pursue the cause of nuclear disarmament. While it is easy to take exception to the recent events in South Asia, we are keenly aware that international responses remain the sole alternative in determining a preferable course of action. We remain convinced that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is a valuable international instrument for nuclear disarmament. In the end, the only viable alternative for international peace continues to be a commitment by all States to a total and comprehensive nuclear disarmament.

The Assembly is meeting against the background of a deteriorating international economic situation brought about by the persistence of old problems and the emergence of new ones. The situation has been compounded by the challenges of adjusting to a rapidly liberalizing and globalizing world economy.

The majority of humankind resides in developing countries, and Africa is the least developed of the continents. It is in this regard that my delegation is concerned that after a three-year period of positive economic growth, Africa's economic performance slackened last year, thus demonstrating once again the fragility of the recovery process in our region. A combination of factors, including unpredictable weather conditions, lack of financial resources and poor infrastructure and technology, continue to adversely affect production performances and therefore pose a major constraint on efforts towards recovery, growth and sustainable development.

Trade plays a crucial role in the economic development of any country. Despite the slowdown in production by African countries, the volume of their exports has increased over time. In 1997, for example, Africa's volume of trade increased by 8 per cent, thereby raising the continent's total revenue from trade by 5.9 per cent. However, it is sad to point out that despite all its efforts, Africa's contribution to world trade remains very small and is actually decreasing. Limited access to markets, high tariffs, low commodity prices and low output deny African countries the benefits of the twin process of globalization and trade liberalization. This is unjust, because many of these countries are painfully undertaking major reforms aimed at diversifying their economies. There is therefore an urgent need to address this problem if African countries are to be assisted to increase their participation in global trade. Failure to do so would mean that Africa will continue to be marginalized and will stand to benefit little from the recent years' economic growth and global integration.

Tanzania calls for the establishment of an equitable, secure, non-discriminatory and predictable multilateral trading system that would enhance the trade development possibilities of African countries, and especially of the least developed among us.

The question of sustainable development of African countries also continues to be seriously affected by the heavy debt burden these countries endure. Tanzania is among such affected countries, and is currently spending almost one third of its revenue to pay its external debt, which has now reached a disproportionate rate. My country is currently implementing various debt management programmes to reduce the effects of the debt on Government operations. Despite the resource constraint, my Government has set as a top priority the repayment of its foreign debt, while continuing to negotiate with our creditors on the possibility of rescheduling and/or cancelling some of its debt.

Tanzania believes that the establishment by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative is a step in the right direction in this endeavour. However, as we have had occasion to state in the past, we are concerned about the conditionalities associated with this initiative. A way out has to be found to ensure that the criteria are made more objective so that as many least developed countries as possible benefit from this otherwise important initiative. What could be a more objective criterion for eligibility under the Initiative than poverty itself? In the same manner, we support the call for the holding of an international conference on money and finance.

On the eve of the new millennium, Tanzania notes with regret that poverty levels remain very high, despite the observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty two years ago. This is unacceptable, and it is not sustainable in the long run.

While those who have more can decide to turn a blind eye or ignore our calls to look for a solution to this human tragedy, it cannot be overemphasized that poverty is the root cause of many problems that cut across the boundaries between rich and poor. The interconnectedness of the world leaves no country insulated from the problems of others. Indeed, even if not in the same sense, the recent financial crisis in Asia and its global ramifications serves to illustrate this fact.

It has been argued that foreign direct investment is more effective in bringing about development than official development assistance. This could be so, but my delegation is concerned that private capital flows are going only to a few selected countries. This leaves the majority of the poor developing countries little hope of extricating themselves from the poverty trap.

Official development assistance is still an important factor in assisting developing countries in their efforts to upgrade infrastructure, which is necessary to attract direct foreign investment. It is unrealistic, therefore, to expect this enormous cost to be met by private capital or domestic savings alone. We therefore urge the developed countries to arrest the trend of diminishing official development assistance and fulfil the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product. We would like to thank those partners that have reached the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product. Others should emulate the example they have set.

Tanzania attaches great importance to South-South cooperation as a means of attaining collective self-reliance and complementing international development cooperation. In this regard, my country will continue to work very closely with other developing countries for the realization of this goal, for we believe that this is the best way for countries of the South to integrate themselves into the global economy.

My delegation urges the international donor community to extend its support to the South-South cooperation arrangements initiated by the developing countries. In particular, countries of the South wish to be assisted in developing capacities in science and technology that are suitable for local conditions.

We call on the United Nations system to continue assisting countries of the South, and in particular the least developed ones, to mobilize the necessary resources to enable them to enter the twenty-first century of science and technology with confidence.

Before concluding my statement, I would like to extend our condolences and sympathy to the Government and people of the many Caribbean island nations, as well as the United States, who have been and continue to be devastated by Hurricane Georges. Our hearts go out particularly to the people of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Puerto Rico, who have suffered the most devastation.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate our strong belief in and commitment to the United Nations and its aspirations and the principles of the Charter. However, we are conscious of the fact that the strength, or otherwise, of the United Nations will stem from the moral and material support rendered by its Members. This is the challenge we all have to pursue ceaselessly in the interests of international peace and security and for the equitable development of humanity.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Chairman of the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda, His Excellency Mr. Patrick Albert Lewis.

Mr. Lewis (Antigua and Barbuda): On behalf of the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at this fifty-third session. You are well known to envoys from my country who have worked with you and who can attest to your humanistic and unprejudiced vision of the world. We feel confident that under your guidance this will be a productive session. I likewise wish to express my country's recognition to your predecessor, Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, for the skilful manner in which he conducted the work of the fifty-second session. I also pay tribute to the Secretary-General, who is entrusted with the advancement of this Organization at such a critical time in history. I am also grateful to the Secretariat for scheduling Antigua and Barbuda in this slot.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), of which Antigua and Barbuda is a proud member. Despite the utterances of the prophets of doom, CARICOM did much more than survive, and the areas of cooperation deepened and widened. What started as a free-trade arrangement has expanded, and is now marked by a number of significant institutions in areas such as education and health, as well as in sports and culture. This year the Order of the Caribbean Community award was given to four individuals, among them the former Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, the Right Honourable Vere Cornwall Bird, appropriately dubbed "The father of the Nation". In accepting the award, the former Prime Minister stated:

> "despite the difficulties, we have erected fine institutions — institutions that are a tribute to the resourcefulness of our leaders and the support of the people. But, difficult as they were to build, it is easy for them to be tumbled unless today's leaders and people are prepared to safeguard and preserve them. To do so requires the same vision, the same determination and the same spirit of selflessness that motivated the previous generation."

I assure you, Mr. President, that the spirit that he mentioned is steadfast among us, and that there is no turning back.

Peace, security and disarmament are vital to a safe and secure planet, and the countless individuals who live daily in constant fear, whether in regard to terrorism, hatred between ethnic groups, internecine warfare or religious persecution, give us much concern. Added to that is the expanding nuclear rivalry. The nuclear club is no longer exclusive to the five permanent members of the Security Council. The question to be posed is whether the five long-time nuclear Powers will now accept that the only way to prevent nuclear proliferation is to abolish all nuclear weapons, a factor that has been repeatedly stressed in debates within these hallowed walls and in General Assembly resolutions. Or will the club quickly move beyond the present seven members? We urge that this matter be given the serious consideration it deserves, as we must commit ourselves to future generations. But we are presently dismayed about the future of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Irrespective of the high praise given to globalization, to most of the developing world it hurts, and hurts excessively. For the past four years — that is, since the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) — disturbing signs have emerged of trends which point in the direction of exclusion rather than inclusion, and of marginalization rather than integration. And these trends are now having a serious negative effect on countries which recently were optimistically viewing their prospects.

The multilateral financial institutions, which provide resources to developing countries at concessional rates, continue, despite numerous protests and logical arguments presented to them, to use gross national product as a basis for judging our economic wherewithal. Somehow, globalization and liberalization will work magic, irrespective of the existing and deep-seated problems of small States, it is assumed. The case of bananas must be highlighted. The undoing of the Lomé trade agreement, with the injury which this hostile act can inflict on the small banana-exporting countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, of which Antigua and Barbuda is a member, gives grave cause for concern. Small, peace-loving States, causing no harm to

any other State under the terms of the Lomé agreement, have found themselves yoked by the World Trade Organization ruling. Without some form of protection, the banana industry in the CARICOM States could collapse, leading to severe social dislocation, which would ultimately manifest itself in political catastrophe.

The multilateral trading system needs to be fair and equitable, and the imbalances in the present agreements should be rectified. The benefits of the system should accrue to all States in relation to their needs, and not in proportion to their share in international trade. There needs to be recognition of the serious limitations of the principle of reciprocity as an instrument for mutually advantageous trading arrangements when the participating countries have different levels of development. The WTO must contribute to achieving positive coherence in global economic policy.

Widespread and equitably shared economic growth will surely benefit all. In fact, the developed countries will be important beneficiaries of the economic growth and development of developing countries, which will provide larger markets and better opportunities, respectively, for their products and investment. This will also lead to global peace and prosperity, ensuring a truly stable framework for international relations based on mutuality of benefits.

My Government welcomed the twentieth special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held between 8 and 10 June 1998. In the Caribbean the Non-Self-Governing Territories have the same problems in regard to narcotics as the independent countries. There is a multidimensional thrust upon our entities, as there is a challenge to governability by non-State actors and the drug operators. The influence of the drug-traffickers forces our Governments to shift very limited resources from development priorities to law enforcement and the rehabilitation of addicts. The social erosion, economic dislocation and increase in criminal activity mean that for small societies striving to overcome economic vulnerability it becomes a tremendous challenge to maintain functioning institutions in an environment with the potential for decreased productivity.

Quite frankly, there is the possibility for all of us to become the involuntary victims of the drug trade. It is no secret that the small island developing States and low-lying coastal States of the Caribbean have inadequate defences against the vast resources of the drug-traffickers. In addition, if we are not sufficiently fearful of the devastation that can be caused by the illicit traffic in narcotics, we must be gravely concerned about the destruction that can accompany the attendant traffic in small arms and ammunition. In one of the most comprehensive plans of action on Caribbean policy and development, the West Indian Commission noted that nothing poses greater threats to civil society in CARICOM countries than the drug problem; and nothing exemplifies the powerlessness of regional Governments more.

My Prime Minister addressed the issue of powerlessness of regional Governments in a recent statement to the Caribbean Studies Association. In that statement he referred to the dictatorial approach taken by certain countries. Given our limited capabilities, we acknowledge the importance of cooperation to develop mechanisms that can respond to incidents of drug-trafficking. We encourage collaboration, therefore, where appropriate, to achieve the desired results — the apprehension and conviction of criminals.

Allow me to speak briefly on the subject of alternative development policies. Antigua and Barbuda and indeed other Caribbean countries that introduced an offshore financial services sector did so as a direct response to the perceived need to diversify our economies in the face of globalization and trade liberalization. On the one hand, when we choose the financial services sector and follow the example of other countries that have done so before us, we are labelled as havens for money-launderers and corruption, and steps are taken to undermine our efforts and limit the competitive advantage that we may enjoy. We do not believe that this approach lends itself to genuine partnership and mutual respect. What we need is collaboration, information exchange and technical support to assist us in ensuring that our financial services sector is not abused by dubious sources while it provides us with much needed economic resources.

History clearly proves that drug abuse and illicit trafficking know no boundaries; no country is inoculated against their effects. It is logical to conclude, therefore, that the fight against drug-trafficking and abuse must transcend any individual country strategy.

My Government supports an unbiased approach to the United Nations thematic agenda on drug control for the twenty-first century. The decision to focus on demand reduction, elimination of illicit crops, judicial cooperation, money-laundering, stemming illicit production of synthetic drugs and the control of drug-production chemicals must be consistent with the desire for a global strategy against drug-trafficking. The

transnational nature of the drug problem warrants such concerted action to create the drug-free world that we all desire.

Antigua and Barbuda is committed to this global strategy. We have signed a number of interdiction agreements and appointed an official to coordinate national action against drug-trafficking and related crimes. This official works closely with the Attorney General to ensure formulation and implementation of the national drug policy. In addition to the policy initiatives, we are currently completing work on a drug treatment facility that we hope will be used not only as a centre for rehabilitation, but also as a training facility in the region.

It seems logical that a word should be said here in regard to the adoption of the Statute for the International Criminal Court, as Caribbean nations had hoped that such a Court would aid in the elimination of the narcotic scourge. The media did not, to any significant extent, diffuse the idea that it was a Caribbean country, Trinidad and Tobago, that revived the idea for an international criminal court after a lapse of 41 years. In 1989 Trinidad and Tobago reintroduced to the United Nations the concept of 1948.

But the specific reasons for establishing the Court as advanced by Trinidad and Tobago and other States of the Caribbean Community were put on the back burner. We had pleaded for a Court that would try to sentence those involved in the trans-shipment of narcotics, in terrorism and in marine abuses, including the violation of our territorial waters. What is before us is a Court emphasizing genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression. All of these we support, yet we are faced with a clear indication that we are still on the periphery.

The West Indies have always been on the periphery of dominant economic systems — in reference, that is, to the post-Columbian era. The West Indies, since the initial period of colonization, have provided goods and services for more advanced industrial entities. The very nature of our colonization — that is, to exist as colonies of exploitation as opposed to colonies of settlement — demanded continued underdevelopment. The sad thing is that, today, the multilateral financial institutions which provide resources to developing countries at concessional rates continue to use gross national product as a basis for judging our economic wherewithal. The present situation in regard to my country provides a most germane example.

The envoys of Antigua and Barbuda are basking in their glory because of the high ranking the country received in the 1998 Human Development Report. The laudations and accommodations received have been profuse, but this very factor puts forward the absurd premise that we are more developed than Mexico or Brazil. Antigua and Barbuda is deemed to be middle-income, and its numerous vulnerabilities are ignored as gross national product is the sole deciding factor. Our challenge is to convince the international agencies that we should be on the priority list for development loans and assistance. Antigua and Barbuda and other Caribbean countries have demonstrated how developing countries can use their limited resources for the advancement of their populations. We should not be penalized for progress.

Small island developing States are constantly and continually at risk, whether through sea-level rise, hurricanes, earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, as has been the case with the emerald isle of Montserrat. A single hurricane can put back our development some 10 years. For ourselves, we have put out a plea for international assistance, as for the third time in three years we have been afflicted by a hurricane. Until the passage of hurricane Georges, our country had been advancing because of the prudent and experienced management for which we are known. We had built a network of superb roads and improved our telecommunications system, tourism had re-established itself after the powerful Hurricane Louis of 1995, new buildings including schools had been erected, and our economy was on course for 8 per cent growth by the end of the year. This, of course, duly manifests the absurdity of using gross national product as a basis for eliminating us from consideration for concessional loans. At present we have to ask our friends and well-wishers for assistance. In that connection, a draft resolution is being circulated on United Nations assistance to Caribbean countries affected by hurricane Georges.

This year we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. My country will continue to focus on efforts to ensure that the protection of human rights is integrated into all activities of the United Nations system. We view seriously the many reports of child abuse worldwide. We are concerned about children affected by internecine warfare, and the now rampant tales of child labour, child prostitution and child pornography. Additionally, we will remain vigilant in seeing to the mainstreaming of women's concerns. Overall, my country will be exercising efforts to see to

the furtherance of endeavours to strengthen human rights programmes.

In approaching the twenty-first century, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has decided that it should focus on human capital and its development, rather than focusing narrowly on the economic question. There will be a continuance of the policy of carrying out intense investigations and feasibility studies to decide on where to concentrate limited resources. In addition, even though the Government is divesting itself of some of its holdings and encouraging greater private investment in vital services and commodities, there are some areas, particularly those surrounding technology, in which the Government has to remain directly involved and catalytic; it will continue its practice of seeking consensus to determine key industries and activities that are crucial and critical for development.

In concluding, a statement has to be made in regard to our appreciation for the work done in the Caribbean by the United Nations Development Programme. Particular thanks have to be expressed for its work in economic management and governance initiatives. We will continue to be proud of and to cherish the United Nations, as we recognize its capacity for achievements in areas beyond the reach of national or regional authorities. Subsequently, the nations that compose this Assembly must redouble their collective commitment to translate vision into reality. That is why it is essential to have international cooperation for development in the forefront of our activities. The United Nations is still our greatest hope for peace, development and social justice.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and elected President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and elected President of the Palestinian Authority, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and elected President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Arafat (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): For the first time, Palestine is participating in the work of the General Assembly under the agenda item entitled "General debate". That participation is a result of the resolution adopted by the Assembly on upgrading Palestine's representation at the United Nations, which we consider to be an essential step towards full membership.

I would like, at this time, to express the deep gratitude of the Palestinian people to all Member States that supported this important resolution by an overwhelming majority. They have thus reflected the will of the States and peoples of the world for the need to realize justice for the Palestinian people in order to regain their international status and their seat at the United Nations.

I would like to extend to you, Mr. President, our sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at the fifty-third session. I wish you complete success in your important and noble task during these crucial times in our contemporary world and in our international Organization.

I also extend our gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko for guiding and presiding effectively over the fifty-second session. I would like in particular to praise his leadership during the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly on illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories.

It gives me great pleasure to commend the Secretary-General of the United Nations, our friend Mr. Kofi Annan, for his distinguished and wise leadership, and I congratulate him for the many successes he has achieved in several fields. We had the honour, Mr. Secretary-General, of welcoming you a few months ago in our country, Palestine, where you observed and witnessed first-hand the tragedy of the Palestinian people and the suffering they endure as a result of the continuing Israeli occupation of our homeland, Palestine. It is my hope that we will have the opportunity to welcome you in the future under better circumstances: on the day when the occupation has been terminated and Palestine has been restored its freedom.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, our world is witnessing — and all of mankind is experiencing — great changes and important events, from globalization and the problems of the international financial market to the technological revolution, satellite communications and the information age. All of the rapid

changes that have rocked our contemporary world require the necessary enhancement of our collective work within the framework of the United Nations. This should be done on the basis of the purposes and principles of the Charter and for the bolstering of international cooperation in various arenas and for the acceleration of the North-South dialogue in order to establish a better world where peace, justice and prosperity for all mankind prevail.

Many of the difficult and complicated tasks in this regard have been forced upon us and we must deal with them effectively. We have before us the task of economic and social development — particularly that of the countries of the third world — solving the debt crisis and the problems of poverty, famine, disease and migration in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These challenges require the attainment of international comprehensive measures and equitable relations that are more rational and more just. Many global problems — such as terrorism, drugs, epidemics and organized crime — require strengthening the rule of international law, as well as the establishment of the necessary institutions and mechanisms within the framework of the United Nations.

In this connection, we also welcome the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which is an important step in the promotion of law and in putting an end to atrocities and crimes against humanity.

All of these challenges and responsibilities should not prevent us from recalling that many of the basic tasks of the international community in our contemporary world have not yet been accomplished. There are peoples who still remain under foreign occupation — including our Palestinian people, who have been and continue to be exposed to one of the gravest injustices. This great people did not commit a crime; they did not commit aggression against anyone nor did they occupy the land of any other people. However, they were the victims of aggression. Their land was occupied and they were dispersed and compelled by military force to a life in diaspora and exile. There are still 4 million Palestinian refugees living in camps awaiting the realization of international justice and the implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy to accord them justice and put an end to more than half a century of the tragedy of living in exile as refugees.

It is also necessary to exert more effort to resolve many of the regional conflicts and problems — including, of course, those in the Middle East; in the Balkan region, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina; in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Special efforts and additional resources are necessary to solve the problems of the African continent in order to allow that great continent to move forward on the path of development and progress. These should include seeking to restore normal conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and achieving peace and stability in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa.

It is also important to consider the issue of sanctions because of its terrible and destructive effects on peoples and on neighbouring States. Here I refer specifically to Iraq, Libya and Sudan. While we call for solutions to these problems and the lifting of sanctions on the basis of the implementation of Security Council resolutions, we cannot but express the feeling of many of us concerning the use of double standards in implementing this principle. In this regard, I would like to express our satisfaction with the progress that has been achieved, in particular with regard to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Finally, I turn to an extremely important question: the question of nuclear disarmament, weapons of mass destruction and non-proliferation. While strongly supporting the goals of the international community in this regard, we refer in particular to the immense problem existing in our region of the possession by Israel of such weapons, and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and place its nuclear installations under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The small size of our region and its nature exacerbate the dangers stemming from the continuation of this situation. What occurred recently in South Asia must encourage us all towards sincere cooperation and a commitment to the application of one standard with regard to this issue.

In order to accomplish all of these things, we need a United Nations that is more effective. We support the efforts exerted by many States and the efforts of the Secretary-General in this regard. At the same time, we feel and believe that our goal must go beyond reducing expenditures, downsizing the Secretariat, streamlining the General Assembly and expanding the Security Council, though all of these are important issues. Our goal must go beyond that to achieve the complete democratization of this global Organization. In this context, it is necessary to enhance the role of the General Assembly and also to find solutions to the veto question in the Security Council, particularly its frequent and excessive use. Transparency and clear rules of procedure must prevail in the Council. At this juncture, I should like to remind

the Assembly that since 1973 our question has been subjected to 21 vetoes in the Security Council by one of the permanent members of the Council, the most recent of which occurred in a period of less than two weeks. In short, it is necessary to secure for all Members of the United Nations the ability to contribute effectively on the basis of mutual respect.

Last May, the Palestinian people commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of Al-Nakba, the dispossession and the suffering of the Palestinian people. Despite all of these bitter years, the oldest and largest refugee question in our contemporary world remains unresolved, and our land still suffers under occupation and colonial settlement. Its natural resources are subjected to exploitation, and the city of Al-Quds al-Sharif is still being subjected to Judaization, land confiscation, the demolition of homes, the confiscation of identity cards from its inhabitants, the imposition of a certain demographic composition and artificial administrative measures. There is also the isolation of the city of Bethlehem and the conflict occurring in Al-Khalil — Hebron — and the rest of the Palestinian cities. Eight million Palestinians are still being deprived of their right to exercise sovereignty over their land, a right that the rest of the peoples of the world enjoy.

Despite all of this, despite the long and grave suffering and pain, and with long and legendary steadfastness, our Palestinian people have been able to survive and preserve their national identity. Our people chose the peace option and accepted the will of the international community in this regard. Accordingly, we decided with our Arab brothers to participate in the peace process, which began in Madrid in 1991. Then we took the well-known historical step leading to the Oslo agreement with Israel, which was signed at the White House in Washington, D.C., under the auspices of President Clinton, on 13 September 1993. That development carried the promise of an historic reconciliation and coexistence between the two peoples, the prospect of a new Middle East and the beginning of the establishment of a comprehensive and permanent peace in the region.

Indeed, all parties realized tangible achievements, and the Palestinian people were able to start building their institutions and dealing with the destructive consequences of the long years of occupation. In particular, they held general and democratic elections and established the Palestinian National Authority. Despite all of the difficulties that confronted the process, the general trend to forward progress continued, until the peace process was dealt a severe blow by the assassination of the late Yitzhak Rabin, my partner in the peace process — the peace of the brave — by an Israeli extremist. This was followed by other blows resulting from the bombings and the grave deterioration of the living conditions of our people and deliberate acts to destroy the peace.

When the Government of Benjamin Netanyahu took office in Israel, a new chapter began with its adoption of general political guidelines that were not consistent with the existing agreements. The Government publicly tried to discard the principles of the peace process — Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace. It ceased implementation of the existing agreements with the exception of the redeployment in Al-Khalil, which was achieved only after intensive American efforts. The Israeli Government continued to prevaricate and refrained from honouring the obligations of the transitional period, which are of great importance to our people, including the safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the airport, the seaport; the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons, and the industrial zones. Neither the first stage of redeployment, which was supposed to begin on 7 March 1997, nor the second stage, which was supposed to begin on 7 September 1997, were effected. Both of these, along with the third redeployment — the deadline for which has also been missed since the middle of this year — should have led to the withdrawal of the Israeli army from 90 per cent of our land.

Moreover, this Government's policies of economic suffocation, closure and direct oppression of our people — which costs us about $10 million a day — constitute an economic catastrophe. The Government has continued with the intensification of settlements and the Judaization of Jerusalem, the isolation of Bethlehem and the old city of Al-Khalil, and the disapproval of the operation of the Palestinian airport, safe passage, industrial zones and the seaport, in order to escalate the suffocation and siege of our people and to destroy the peace process.

All of these policies and positions adopted by the Government of Mr. Netanyahu have caused the current dangerous situation and the complete stalemate in the peace process on the Palestinian track, as well as on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, which have been completely stalemated. These policies and positions have also engendered the general tension prevailing in the region and the danger of descending into complete chaos. The whole world has expressed grave concern at this and has

called upon the Israeli side to change its policies and positions and to comply with the bases of the peace process and implement the existing agreements.

It is high time for the international community, in adherence with international law and in service to peace, to effectively and tangibly pressure the Israeli side to realize the goals of peace, security and stability — not only in the Middle East but internationally. This means implementing the agreements that were signed at the White House under the auspices of President Clinton by the Russian Federation, the United States of America, the European Union, Norway, Egypt and Jordan and in the presence of Japan. It means implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace, which were the bases of the Madrid Peace Conference.

With the hope of halting the deterioration of the existing situation, the Palestinian side, in cooperation with many of the concerned parties, has recently sought to intensify efforts, particularly with the help of the United States co-sponsor — and especially with the help of President Clinton, to whom we express our gratitude. These efforts resulted in the United States initiative, containing all of the important pending issues, that was submitted to the parties concerned. As delegates are aware, the Palestinian side accepted this American initiative despite the fact that it did not meet our minimum just and legitimate demands. But the Israeli side still rejects this initiative and continues in its attempts to undermine it and pre-empt its contents. President Clinton, thankfully, sent Secretary of State Albright and Mr. Dennis Ross, who have made great efforts to move the peace process forward and protect it.

Despite all these efforts, the Israeli Government has not responded. Hence, we call upon the United States co-sponsor to announce its initiative and to publicly and clearly put the onus on the party that is impeding peace. We also call upon the United States to continue to work effectively in a manner consistent with its responsibilities to the peace process and with its interests and credibility in the Middle East region, and so as to protect the region from the dangers emanating from the destruction of the peace process.

This morning, President Clinton graciously took an important step to save the peace process and to move it forward by convening a meeting at the White House between the Palestinian and Israeli delegations. This was an important meeting to promote and preserve the peace process, and we thank President Clinton for that, particularly as the efforts of the United States will continue to move the process forward and promote the implementation of the signed agreements.

In this context we call upon the other parties concerned, particularly the Russian Federation in its capacity as one of the two co-sponsors of the peace process, as well as China and Japan, to activate and intensify their efforts. We also call upon the European Union, with its economic and political interests and capabilities, to move quickly and effectively to salvage and safeguard the peace process. In this same vein, we call upon all Member States to support the French-Egyptian initiative to convene an international conference of all States determined to save the peace process from the dangerous crisis it has reached.

We have not lost hope for the peace process, and we will continue to honour our obligations in accordance with the existing agreements. At the same time, we will not give up on the necessity of Israeli compliance with those agreements and the need for the Israelis to fulfil their pending obligations. We will not give up our inalienable national rights — the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

At this stage, I wish to extend, on behalf of the Palestinian people, our deep gratitude to all the donor countries and to the World Bank for their valuable contributions aimed at alleviating the suffering of our people and at assisting them in building and developing their homeland and at achieving meaningful economic and social development. I reiterate our gratitude to these countries and the World Bank, particularly because they are contributing despite the obstacles and impediments imposed by Israel in this regard.

It is so difficult to separate the United Nations from the question of Palestine, for this international Organization has been dealing with our cause since its inception. It was the United Nations which partitioned Palestine, and to this time it has not ceased to deal with the results of the events that followed, with the repeated and increasing injustices perpetrated against our people, for which no remedy has yet been found. While reaffirming the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine, we appeal to all of you to enhance your solidarity and support for our people in the coming period, through these critical circumstances, on the basis of respect for the principles

of the United Nations Charter, international law and international humanitarian law.

We expect that the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 will be convened before the end of this year on measures to apply the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Al-Quds al-Sharif, in accordance with the recommendations made repeatedly by the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In this context, we also expect Israeli participation in the work of the fifty-third session of the Assembly to be in conformity with international law, thus ensuring that Israeli credentials do not cover those territories determined by the Security Council and the General Assembly, since 1967, as occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including occupied East Jerusalem. This is a matter on which there is a consensus by the international community.

From this venue, I would like to call upon all of you, the source of international legitimacy and peacemaking, the guardian of freedom, security and stability and the source for the achievement of justice and prosperity for humankind, to stand by our people, especially as the five-year transitional period provided for in the Palestinian-Israeli agreements will end on 4 May 1999. Our people demand that we shoulder our responsibilities, and they await the establishment of their independent State. This independent Palestinian State must be established as an embodiment of the right of our people to self-determination. I assure you that our people will continue to pursue and protect the peace of the brave in the Middle East. We appeal to you to continue your support for us, as always in the decisive moments of the history, the present and the future of our people. Help us to achieve the national goal of our people in the establishment of their State.

It is not admissible for Israel to continue dominating the Palestinian people. Everyone is aware that 100 per cent peace means 100 per cent security and 100 per cent freedom. One hundred per cent freedom. I repeat — 100 per cent peace, 100 per cent security and 100 per cent freedom. One hundred per cent freedom. If the Israeli Government wants reciprocity, I declare from this podium my demand of them for mutual compliance with the signed agreements, especially in the fields of security and the protection of Palestinians and Israelis against all forms of violence and terrorism and its sources. I invite the Israeli Government to engage in common, serious work between us to address that. There is no alternative to peace. Help us to achieve it.

In the year 2000, the past and the future will meet in Palestine, joined by a global vision of hope and peace for all peoples of the world. On that occasion, the world will celebrate the second millennium of the birth of Jesus Christ — peace be upon him — and the beginning of a new millennium. It is a religious and spiritual occasion of great importance not only for the Palestinian people and the region, but also for all the believers in the world, as well as for the entire international community. The Palestinian people have actually begun serious preparations to celebrate this important religious, historic and international occasion, with the cooperation of many religious, political and social institutions concerned. We call upon you to join us in bearing the responsibility of these preparations, and we invite you to participate directly in the forthcoming celebrations to start together, God willing, a new march.

In this regard, we appreciate the addition by the General Assembly of a new item on its agenda entitled "Bethlehem 2000". We also extend our thanks to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their initiative in this regard. I also take this opportunity to thank its sister Committee, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People.

I look forward to speaking to you once more when Palestine will have taken its natural place in the community of nations, as an independent State, and when peace will have prevailed in the land of peace and in the entire Middle East.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Mr. Kassymjomart Tokaev.

Mr. Tokaev (Kazakhstan): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the high office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session and to assure you of the full support of the delegation of Kazakhstan in your work.

Kazakhstan, in welcoming the efforts of the Secretary-General to reform the United Nations, supports the decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its last session. The steps taken in that direction will undoubtedly

facilitate the renewal of the Organization in the changing historical conditions.

On the thresho'd of the twenty-first century, the world is becoming an integrated and interrelated system in which there is no room for autarchy and self-isolation. Globalization, which embraces the main spheres of human activity, has radically altered the accustomed assumptions about the realities of modern life. Globalization also compels us to reassess the nature of international cooperation from the standpoint of strengthening multilateral mechanisms for taking decisions on the urgent problems that are of concern to the entire world community. Despite all the diversity of national interests, such decisions need to be taken through joint efforts on the basis of goodwill and consensus, and here the role of the United Nations cannot be underestimated.

On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we again note the permanent significance of that instrument in affirming democratic values and the rule of law.

Kazakhstan, seven years after making its choice of democracy and an open society, is today taking tangible steps to intensify its political reforms. Our country is embarking on a comprehensive programme of democratization that covers such important spheres as elections, political parties, Parliament, civil society, the judicial system, the advancement of women and the mass media. The President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbaev, will be taking decisive steps to solve acute social problems, combat corruption and optimize the State administration.

All these measures are aimed at further protecting and guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of every citizen of our multi-ethnic society. We shall do everything within our power to preserve such values as inter-ethnic harmony and the diversity of the cultures and customs of each of the nationalities that make up the people of Kazakhstan. We shall strengthen pluralism in society in order reliably to guarantee the freedoms of conscience, speech and the press and further to strengthen the foundations of a secular democratic society.

Kazakhstan does not believe that it is possible to build its own statehood without successful integration into the world economy and world politics. In this context, we are developing and strengthening our national financial institutions, which has enabled us to cope, at lower cost, with the consequences of the crisis affecting Asia and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

As a proponent of a policy of integration, our head of State is a constant advocate of creating the appropriate economic conditions for this to take place and has proposed, as Chairman of the Customs Union, the conclusion of a treaty on the creation of a unified economic space within the CIS.

Kazakhstan, which pursues a policy of constructive cooperation, has created a zone of security and good-neighbourliness around its borders. We are not in confrontation with any State in the world. As a Eurasian State, Kazakhstan sees the development of friendly, equitable and mutually beneficial relations with the countries of the East and the West as a priority of its foreign policy.

We believe that Kazakhstan's voluntary renunciation of its nuclear heritage and its firm adherence to the non-proliferation regime constitute important prerequisites for the attainment of this strategic objective. A few days ago, the second International Conference on the problems of non-proliferation was held in the town of Kurchatov, which is within the territory of the former nuclear testing-ground at Semipalatinsk. During the conference, the last strategic missile launch silo was shut down.

Kazakhstan consistently advocates the creation of security structures on the Asian continent. We note with satisfaction that the initiative of our country's President to convene a conference on interaction and confidence-building measures in Asia is taking solid shape and becoming a tangible factor in present-day international life. This is attested to by the meeting which took place in Almaty in July of the leaders of Kazakhstan, China, the Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on issues of cooperation and confidence-building measures in the region. We believe that the agreements signed with China on the delimitation of the Kazakh-Chinese border will make a major contribution to strengthening regional security and stability. The Kazakh-Russian Declaration on eternal friendship and alliance for the twenty-first century and the Treaty of eternal friendship between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are also of great importance.

Kazakhstan, as a firm proponent of strengthening regional and global security, strongly condemns any undermining of the non-proliferation regime and calls on India and Pakistan to heed the views of the vast majority of the world community and accede without delay to the

Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We support the call of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for those countries to join in the negotiations on prohibitions of the production of fissionable materials for nuclear weapons and to refrain from deploying such weapons in their territory. In the context of strengthening regional security and the non-proliferation regime, Kazakhstan will continue to work for the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia.

The demonstrations of our country's involvement in the peacekeeping activities of the United Nations include the formation of a peacekeeping battalion in Central Asia and Kazakhstan's participation in the United Nations stand-by arrangements system.

From this high podium, we cannot fail to pay attention to the current situation in Afghanistan. The events taking place there, which are accompanied by mass violations of human rights and the fundamental norms of international law, have become a subject of profound concern to us. Kazakhstan has made and will continue to make its contribution to the achievement of peace in that country. The task of the world community is to convince all the parties to the conflict to cease military action right away and sit down at the negotiating table with a view to establishing a Government of national reconciliation. We are convinced that no military solution to the Afghan problem exists. A peace process in Afghanistan is possible only if interference from outside is halted and full support is given to the efforts of the Secretary-General. Not only immediate neighbours, but all interested countries, must take an active part in the search for ways of solving the Afghan problem.

One of the most difficult present-day problems is international terrorism and organized crime. Kazakhstan rejects terrorism in all its manifestations and is ready to participate in international efforts to combat this evil. On the threshold of the next century, a handful of madmen cannot be allowed to blackmail and endanger the lives and well-being of people who uphold the ideas of creation and peace. This is doubly dangerous in the case of nuclear terrorism.

International organized crime is associated in one way or another with illegal drug-trafficking. Most unfortunately, the scale of the drug business is constantly growing. Drug addiction, moving freely across borders, is undermining statehood and the moral foundations of society. Increasingly, more young people are becoming addicted to drugs. We are witnessing a new phenomenon of drug production becoming a leading component of national economies. Drugs from Afghanistan are to be found in virtually all countries of the world. Accordingly, we support the decisions of the twentieth special session of the General Assembly on international drug control and will participate actively in their implementation.

In speaking of the main problems that ail mankind, we cannot forget separatism. Kazakhstan has more than once stated its position that it does not accept ethnic separatism. Given the calamities it is inflicting on many States, now is the time to declare unambiguously that separatism must be proclaimed outside the law. The right of nations to self-determination cannot under present historical circumstances play the role that it played at the beginning of this century.

Yet another global problem which casts a cloud over the future of mankind is the ever deteriorating environmental situation. Kazakhstan has in all truth experienced the consequences of environmental disasters. From this high podium, the President of Kazakhstan has more than once called on the world community to unify and coordinate efforts to protect the environment. We are grateful to the General Assembly for the support that has been extended to our country, as reflected in the resolution on assistance in overcoming the consequences of the nuclear tests in the Semipalatinsk region.

The Aral Sea disaster has become genuinely global in nature. Deposits of salt from the exposed bed of the Aral Sea have been found in the Arctic Ocean and in Western Europe. While noting with gratitude the assistance from the United Nations, we nevertheless call on the States Members of our Organization to pay greater attention to this serious problem and to take more active and specific steps to solve it.

The peculiarity of the geographical situation of Kazakhstan, and of Central Asia as a whole, confronts us with an acute problem of access to world markets, including the transport of hydrocarbons. Kazakhstan therefore attaches great importance to cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized agencies to develop transit transport systems in the landlocked Central Asian States.

Reviving the traditions of the Great Silk Road, Kazakhstan is interested in expanding and developing transportation networks in Central Asia and beyond. Our country, with its vast territory, is an important link

between Asia and Europe. Our participation in the Transport Corridor: Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) project will undoubtedly facilitate an increase in the effectiveness of the transport system in the vast area of the Eurasian continent.

We place great hopes in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), recently adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Kazakhstan, as the Chairman of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), intends to make a real contribution to stepping up the activity of this important regional forum. The Declaration and other documents adopted at the ECO summit in Almaty creates good prerequisites for the creation of a favourable trade climate in relations between the ECO member countries and their potential partners in Europe and Asia. We believe that ECO is a promising organization and has great potential for expanding economic ties in the territories of 10 States with a total population of more than 300 million people. Kazakhstan will work for the further strengthening of cooperation between the ECO and the United Nations.

Another issue that must be included among today's urgent problems is the legal status of the Caspian Sea. We note with satisfaction the progress made in reaching consensus on this complex and delicate subject, which affects the interrelations among the five littoral States. The agreement signed between Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation in July this year on the delimitation of the northern part of the Caspian Sea lays the foundations for a complete settlement of the Caspian problem. It is now important to take concrete steps for the implementation of this instrument, which is in conformity with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

A solution of the Caspian problem is of strategic importance for Kazakhstan. We are interested in reliably ensuring the export of our mineral resources through multiple-option oil-gas pipelines. We expect early implementation of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium project, and we believe that the construction of an oil pipeline from western Kazakhstan to China offers promising prospects. We support the trans-Caspian project for an oil and gas pipeline, Baku-Ceyhan, and we view the project for an oil pipeline through the territory of Iran as very promising.

It must be noted with regret that mankind will be entering the next century burdened by many serious problems. But, at the same time, there are no grounds for unrelieved pessimism, since the passing century, which witnessed two world wars, the development and testing of lethal types of weapons and a multiplicity of regional and ethnic conflicts, has developed reliable mechanisms — our Organization first among them — for preventing and settling international problems. The cause of peace, security and development is of concern to all States. We must, therefore, all act as a united whole. Kazakhstan is ready to take part in this work for peace and cooperation.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Attaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria.

Mr. Attaf (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): A unanimous tribute has been paid to you, Sir, and, through you, to your country, Uruguay, by your election to the presidency at this session of the General Assembly. I am pleased to join in that tribute by congratulating you on this well-deserved distinction and wishing you all success in the discharge of your mission.

I should also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Udovenko, who was able to meet our expectations in exemplary fashion at a time when our Organization was embarking on a course of reform. Mr. Kofi Annan has fully committed himself, with imagination and courage, to that same course of reform, and he has succeeded in making strides that call for our sincere expression of gratitude and recognition.

Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

That reform is now on the right course. It is meeting the collective expectations that have been expressed. But more than that, it comes at the right moment, just as new problems are arising to test our skills in diagnosing the new challenges and in formulating policies that are capable of responding to these challenges and aspirations.

However new these problems may be, they are a natural consequence of humanity's progress towards the fulfilment of its destiny. They have arisen out of the unprecedentedly swift changes that have taken place in international relations for a full decade.

These problems have names. They present challenges that were heretofore unknown to us, and they

demand solutions that go beyond our customary frameworks of thought, analysis and action. Let us first identify these problems by their names: globalization, interdependence, development, peace and collective security.

These are but workshops which nourish our diverse debates and contradictory approaches. They raised certainties on the part of some and doubts and warnings on the part of others. Until now, the debate has been limited to exchanges of ideas, confined to the approaches or projections that each of us has formulated from our own perspectives, our own calculations and our own national interests. Today, the facts themselves have been determined. It is incumbent upon us to confront what yesterday was nothing but conjecture and today is a living reality, in keeping with the principles and ideals of the United Nations which our countries embody.

This is the case with globalization, which was long presented to us as being capable of ensuring universal prosperity, and to which was attributed the virtue of limitless growth. However, many of our countries have expressed their doubts, their warnings of the dislocations and dangers which would result from a globalization which lacks the least means of appropriate regulation, coordination and monitoring. In the absence of such instruments of regulation, coordination and monitoring, and given the acknowledged shortcomings of the existing mechanisms, globalization rightly gives rise more often to doubts and fears than to support and conviction.

There is no better illustration of the tragic consequences which could result from those dislocations than the Asian crisis, the results of which are still unfolding, threatening the economies of many regions of the world to such a degree that the spectre of widespread recession has re-emerged. In fact, rather than being a force for integration, globalization has turned into a force for exclusion and marginalization.

This state of affairs forces us to think collectively about how to reimbue globalization with its original and ideal purpose so that it can meet the aspirations placed in it for universal progress in justice and solidarity. Globalization represents a comprehensive challenge which must be met by comprehensive regulation, coordination and dialogue. Until then, the existing mechanisms must be strengthened in their assigned functions of prevention and interposition.

Finally, regional integration as an integral component of a well-balanced and carefully monitored globalization, must be accompanied by bold and effective initiatives.

The problem of interdependence is structurally linked to that of globalization. The arrival of an age of interdependence among nations has fed the great hope of creating and diversifying the bonds that are necessary for expanding the area of cooperation and exchange among our countries. However, the erosion of international cooperation for development, as well as the imbalances in the present system of world economic relations, still represent basic impediments on the road to crystallizing true interdependent relationships.

At the core of the problem of globalization and interdependence is development — a crucial problem, which has not yet received the attention that is due to it. On the contrary, it is increasingly marginalized in our discussions today, as well as in the design of world economic policies.

Finally, the problem of peace and collective security has encountered new challenges other than those with which it was identified before and which still exist till today.

From this perspective, I speak of the phenomenon of terrorism. Terrorism has no respect for human life and is capable of perpetrating the most vile crimes against humankind. By its logic of terror, death and destruction, it seeks to strike at the foundations of every civilized society. For these reasons, terrorism is truly characterized as the most serious threat to our societies and the nations of the world as a whole.

Terrorism is a global phenomenon which calls for a global response from the international community. Algeria is pleased to note that after having underestimated and incorrectly analysed terrorism for a long time, the international community increasingly seems to be more cognizant of its dangers and aware that the time has come to supplement unilateral and isolated action on the part of States fighting terrorism with collective and resolute action.

With this perspective in mind, conditions are now right for us to go beyond mere verbal condemnation of terrorism to ensure that intentions and actions would really go hand in hand through effective international cooperation whose goal is to fight terrorism. The

elimination of this scourge is no longer a mere moral obligation for humankind. It has also become a political necessity in an age of interdependence and globalization.

For that reason Algeria believes that the time has come to give serious consideration to the preparation of a global convention to prevent and fight all acts of terrorism and to serve as a legal framework for the organization and implementation of international cooperation in that matter. Such a project should take shape as of now in the form of concerted and sustained action on the part of the entire international community to dismantle terrorism's multifaceted support networks and rear bases, dry up its financial resources and bring to trial the perpetrators of terrorist acts and their accomplices and abettors. The convening of a world summit on terrorism, which received broad support in this Assembly, would be a basic step in that direction. Algeria fully supports the idea of such a summit and stands completely ready to make its contribution to it.

In view of Algeria's belonging to several spheres — the Maghreb, the Mediterranean, the Arab and the African — it has constructed its foreign policy on the principles of openness, solidarity, good-neighbourliness and cooperation. Algeria embodies these principles in its immediate environment, the Maghreb, convinced that only a united Maghreb community would serve the cause of peace, stability and the development of the countries of our region.

These same principles have moved Algeria to tireless support for a just and definitive solution to the conflict in Western Sahara. We fully support the United Nations settlement plan, in cooperation with the Organization of African Unity, which calls for the holding of a free, fair and impartial referendum on self-determination.

Like the rest of the international community, Algeria welcomes the Houston accord, through which the two parties to the conflict, the Kingdom of Morocco and the POLISARIO front, solemnly agreed on the practical modalities for implementing the provisions of the settlement plan under the auspices of the United Nations. Today, one year after the conclusion of that accord, and despite the real, significant progress resulting, in large part, from the efforts of the Secretary-General, of his Personal Envoy Mr. James Baker, and of his Special Representative, serious obstacles still stand in the path to the plan's implementation. If they are not overcome, these obstacles, which the Secretary-General has clearly identified in successive reports, along with their causes, could seriously compromise the chances of holding the long-awaited referendum.

Therefore it is now necessary to solemnly and urgently appeal for full and strict respect for the commitments undertaken and to reaffirm the responsibility of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, with regard to the full and strict implementation of the settlement plan and the Houston accord so as to ensure that the people of the Western Sahara can exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

As in the Maghreb, Algeria has been working in the Mediterranean to ensure that there will be an atmosphere of stability, peace, cooperation and prosperity. The machinery for consultation and cooperation that was set up through the Barcelona process has opened new horizons for the development of a true partnership between the two shores of that shared sea, a partnership directed towards developing a zone of shared prosperity in the Mediterranean. In this context, Algeria undertook negotiations on an agreement of association with the European Union aimed at putting in place the conditions necessary for renewed and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two parties.

Within the same Mediterranean region, and after the launching of the peace process which raised great hopes, feelings of anxiety and pessimism have again returned since the peace mechanism has become stalemated.

The Israeli Administration, by reneging on commitments made in Oslo and Washington, by abandoning the principle of land for peace, by continuing its settlement policy and by repeatedly attacking the integrity and sacredness of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, has led to the undermining of the peace process, rekindling the frustrations and anger of the Palestinian people and threatening the entire region with a return to the era of confrontation which prevailed there for more than 40 years.

In order to deal with this perilous situation, we must recall that the just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict in the Middle East requires the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces from all the Palestinian and occupied Arab territories and the exercise of the right of self-determination by the Palestinian people, including the establishment of its own State with Al-Quds as its capital.

In the same part of the world, the suffering of the brotherly Iraqi people continues to dismay us. In this regard, we cannot but reiterate our call for the rapid lifting of the embargo on Iraq. Similarly, we renew the same call with regard to the brotherly Libyan people, who are also the victims of cruel economic sanctions, which we hope will be lifted soon, in view of the recent positive developments in the Lockerbie case.

In its relations with its African neighbours, as in its relations with other African countries, Algeria has always worked to ensure that there will be strong bonds of cooperation and solidarity with a view to achieving the political and economic unification of the continent. Intrastate and inter-State conflicts in Africa can only damage this ambitious and legitimate project. We therefore call for the settlement of these conflicts and crises by utilizing existing African mechanisms, particularly the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, on the basis of respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of States and also the frontiers inherited from colonialization.

For a decade Africa has been making profound political, economic and social reforms for which the international community must provide resolute and meaningful support, as the Secretary-General of our Organization called for in his comprehensive and thorough report.

In less than two months the international community will be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such anniversaries provide a good opportunity for collective self-review, which impels us to acknowledge that in the field of human rights, the situation is certainly much better than it was 50 years ago. The people's liberation movement and the global spread of democracy have certainly played a crucial role in promoting and consolidating human rights.

There can be no doubt that the significant progress made in democratization and the establishment within the State of the rule of law will remain fragile and will be endangered unless they are accompanied by meeting the economic, social and cultural needs of the citizens. This is because true democracy cannot take root permanently and soundly in places of deprivation and want.

In this connection and in the name of my country, I wish to reaffirm our strong attachment to the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights and our resolute commitment to promote them free from any manipulation or politicization.

If we wish to sum up these complex and multifarious challenges facing mankind today, this could be done through one essential question: how can we make sure that the evolving new world order will be more just and more secure, will have greater solidarity and will truly address the interests and aspirations of everyone?

That is the question which, of course, involves our country, and through it, mankind as a whole. And what better forum to answer this question is there than the United Nations, which brings us together and through whose Charter we have proclaimed our determination "to practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and ... to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples".

The challenges of the present are embodied in these basic values and these shared purposes. In fact, the primacy given to these values and the attainment of these purposes are contingent on our ability to mobilize our collective energies. Mankind, which has mastered science and technology, has achieved considerable progress in the utilization of the resources of our world and has established its control over the means of its progress. Now it has in its hands the keys to its destiny. Using the keys to its destiny for the common good depends on humankind, and on humankind alone.

The Acting President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Momodou Lamin Sedat Jobe, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Gambia.

Mr. Jobe (Gambia): My delegation would like first of all to congratulate the President on his assumption of the presidency for this session. We know full well that the tasks that lie ahead are indeed challenging, but we are confident that with his vast experience and wisdom he will discharge his responsibilities successfully. Whilst we wish him luck, let me also reassure him of the full cooperation of our delegation at all times.

In the same vein, we would also like to congratulate his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for the admirable manner in which he conducted the activities of the Assembly during the fifty-second session.

My delegation is very proud of Mr. Kofi Annan, our able Secretary-General, for the efficient manner in which he has been running the affairs of our Organization. His impressive contributions in the field of preventive diplomacy, as amply demonstrated on numerous occasions, are worthy of praise. Likewise, in the delicate business of reforms he is equal to the task, for no sooner did he assume office than he embarked on the reform of the United Nations. His success is our success, and therefore we will lend him our full support in our common endeavour to revitalize the Organization and make it more relevant to the realities of these changing times.

We in the Gambia have also been busy with the transformation of our own society under the dynamic and enlightened leadership of President Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh, whose ideal it is to serve the youth and people of Africa by endeavouring to help them to realize their aspirations for peace, stability and justice and progress in socio-economic development. Since we renewed our new democratic tradition, every effort is being made to consolidate this process in an orderly way, mindful of the fact that better and lasting results will be achieved only through a systematic approach.

Moreover, cultivating democracy in the midst of poverty is not an easy task because democracy is, after all, about participation. If the basic needs of the people are not satisfied, they are simply not interested in any political process. Conscious of this hard reality, the Government of President Jammeh quickly put in place a programme of socio-economic development to empower the people and their families, placing great emphasis on social sectors such as health, education and agriculture. In this way, an impressive number of schools have been built around the country, and now we can boast of providing schools for all communities in the Gambia. Health facilities are within reach of all Gambians and are also affordable.

May I at this juncture, on behalf of my Government, express our most sincere gratitude to the Governments of those friendly States — in particular, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Cuba, Egypt and the Republic of China on Taiwan — for the medical assistance they continue to give us during these times of need. This is a meaningful South-South cooperation worthy of emulation.

I am only attempting to share our perception of what inter-State relations should be: caring, sharing, consulting and cooperating for the mutual benefit of all. I cannot think of a better way of cooperation between States for mutual economic development in a world in which the gap between the rich and the poor continues to expand. Now, whilst we are concerned with bridging this gap, we are overwhelmed by another hurricane-like phenomenon, called globalization and liberalization.

Globalization and liberalization were recognized by many to hold many attractions. They were perceived to be the gateway to the integration of developing countries into the global economy. We however observe that while they are yielding ample benefits for developed countries, they have further widened the gap between developed and developing countries, as well as the inequality gap between rich and poor. Their impact on employment and socio-economic development in general has been largely negative.

We are concerned at this growing marginalization of the least developed countries in world trade. The volume of our total exports continues to be under 0.4 per cent of global exports. Increased globalization is further worsening the situation. This negative trend merits coordinated action to alleviate the situation. In this context, we welcome the General Assembly's decision to hold the first high-level dialogue for two days earlier this month on the theme of the social and economic impact of globalization and interdependence and their policy implications. We hope that this meeting will have brought about active engagement of both developed and developing countries, in a spirit of genuine partnership, with a view to reaching a meaningful and successful conclusion and strengthening international economic cooperation for development. Globalization and liberalization must be managed through concerted international effort in order to avoid the further marginalization of developing countries.

The overwhelming burden of external debt today poses one of the most challenging and daunting problems for developing countries. Much has been said about this, and very little has been done to alleviate the problem. We believe that there is a dire need for new financial flows to debtor developing countries, in addition to debt relief measures that include cancellation and concessional financial assistance to enable developing countries to reduce their debt overhang.

In this context, we welcome the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and encourage early and urgent application of its measures. We would also encourage any refinements of the initiative to reduce the structural adjustment period to three years, to increase the debt

reduction level to 90 per cent and to ease the terms for reduction of multilateral debt.

The least developed countries have always received the attention and support of the international community, particularly with the adoption of the Paris Declaration and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s. The realization of the primary objectives of the Programme — to arrest and reverse the deterioration in the socio-economic conditions in the least developed countries — so far remains elusive. The lack of progress in this regard is attributable in the main to the failure of the international community to fulfil its commitments. We hope that the declaration of the ministers of least developed countries at this year's session will encourage our development partners to come forward and work with us in a genuine partnership.

Poverty, deprivation and environmental degradation are the greatest evils facing developing countries today. We agree with the analysis of the Secretary-General in his report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, in particular with regard to the interrelationship between development and peace.

Today, the world is besieged with conflicts, both inter- and intra-State. From the Balkans to the Great Lakes region, human beings continue to prey on one another with guns and knives, machetes and all other sorts of weapons. Unfortunately, women and children suffer the most from these conflicts. We cannot continue to allow this to go on. The time has come when people have to take individual responsibility for crimes they have committed against humankind. Ethnic violence and human rights abuses, a common feature of present day conflicts, cannot be countenanced and cannot be committed with impunity.

My delegation supports fully the resolve of the international community to deal with the problem, and in this context welcomes the establishment of the International Criminal Court. We share the philosophy of Benjamin B. Ferencz, a former Nuremberg prosecutor, that

> "there can be no peace without justice, no justice without law, and no meaningful law without a court to decide what is just and lawful under any given circumstances".

The establishment of the International Criminal Court will ensure that henceforth humanity's response to crimes against humanity will be swift and will be just. Henceforth, no army, no ruler, no junta anywhere can abuse human rights with impunity. The people and the Government of the Gambia look forward to the coming into effect of the statute of the International Criminal Court.

One of the most cherished aspirations of our Organization is to ensure that all men live in peace. The attainment of international peace and security therefore remains one of the most vital preoccupations of our noble Organization. It is for these reasons that my delegation joins the rest of the international community in supporting the efforts of the United Nations to ensure peace and the resolution of conflicts around the world.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to commend the members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) and other regional and subregional arrangements in Africa and beyond for the good work they continue to do in their bid to ensure peace and security. My delegation is particularly thankful to ECOWAS for the restoration on 10 March 1998 of the legitimate and constitutionally elected Government of Sierra Leone. We are still concerned that the rebels have up to this moment refused to lay down their arms. We urge the international community to assist the Government of Sierra Leone in its effort to restore control over all its territory and to concentrate its energies on national reconciliation, reconstruction and economic development. In this regard, my delegation welcomed the holding of the Special Conference on Sierra Leone that was held here in New York at the initiative of the Secretary-General and which we hope will contribute to the process of national reconciliation.

In neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, we hope that the joint peace initiative of ECOWAS and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries will bear fruit, leading to a final settlement of the dispute. In this context, we recognize the need to respect the ceasefire agreed upon in Praia, Cape Verde, on 26 August 1998, which we consider to be an important step in enhancing peace and security in the West African subregion.

The Government of the Gambia is concerned over the number, intensity and interrelationship among conflicts in Africa, and especially at the emergence of new conflicts during the past year. The border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the resurgence of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the impasse in the peace process in Angola, the continued violence by the rebels in Sierra Leone, and the complex humanitarian

emergencies in Guinea-Bissau, Somalia and Sudan, among other problems, cause grave concern to us.

In addition to what I have just said, we are also concerned at the difficulties attendant upon the present conflict situations in Africa, in particular human rights abuses, refugee outflows and the humanitarian needs of innocent persons affected by such conflicts, in particular women and children. The international community, in responding to these conflict situations, must address these issues and the root causes of the conflicts, including in particular the troubling issues of children in armed conflict and the flow of small arms. In this context, my delegation welcomes the actions taken by the Security Council to address these issues following the report of the Secretary-General on Africa. We hope that there will be a United Nations-wide approach to tackle these important issues.

The Lockerbie issue has dragged on for too long. It is about time that a settlement was reached so that the people of the great Libyan Arab Jamahiriya can be relieved of the bite of the excruciating sanctions imposed against them. In accordance with the position taken by the Organization of African Unity, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States and other regional organizations, the Government of the Gambia welcomes the concurrence of the Governments of the United Kingdom and of the United States of America to the proposal to have the two Lockerbie suspects tried in a neutral country, the Netherlands. Consequently, the Government of the Gambia reaffirms its full support for the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in its bid to secure a fair and just trial for the two suspects.

In the light of the recent developments, in the quest to alleviate the immense suffering caused by the economic sanctions imposed on the Libyan nation by Security Council resolutions 748 (1992) and 883 (1993), and to avert any further tightening of sanctions on the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the Government of the Gambia is desirous of the urgent finalization of the arrangements for a lasting solution to this long-drawn-out problem.

Following a review, therefore, of the latest correspondence on the matter between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the Secretary-General, and the agreement concluded between those two countries and the Government of the Netherlands relating to arrangements for the transfer of the suspects to the Netherlands and their trial there, the Government of the Gambia is of the view that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya must be given the opportunity to make an assessment of those documents in order to ensure that its views and concerns are fully taken into consideration with regard to the final arrangements.

Whilst acknowledging the great lengths that all parties have gone to in order to ensure that justice is meted out — and this at the earliest possible opportunity — my country firmly believes that Libya should have a greater input into the final arrangements regarding the hand-over of the two Lockerbie suspects and, most important, that the appropriate guarantees for a just and fair dispensation of justice should prevail. This would be in the spirit of the decision taken in Ouagadougou by the heads of State of the Organization of African Unity at their last summit.

My Government would like to see justice done and the real culprits in the Lockerbie bombing identified and brought to trial very quickly. However, whilst we persist in urging that Libya be associated fully in the quest for mutually acceptable conditions of transfer of the two suspects to the Netherlands and trial there, we will also insist on the need to have all the proof of their direct involvement in this tragic affair being provided to us in the first place. As soon as a reasonable and acceptable *terrain d'entente* is reached, the sanctions must be lifted immediately and unconditionally.

The Gambia's foreign policy is directed by its national interest and that of the continent, as well as by the quest for peace and justice in the world. As members of the Security Council, we are obliged to ask some pertinent questions when certain actions and initiatives have a devastating impact on the lives of human beings. One such issue for which we would want straightforward and clear answers relates to the recent bombing by the Government of the United States of a pharmaceutical complex in Khartoum.

What my Government seeks to know in this respect is whether, assuming in good faith that the complex was indeed involved in the production of deadly and prohibited substances, the Government of the United States fully weighed the consequences of such a terrible strike on the innocent people of the Sudan before sanctioning the bombings. In other words, in the view of the United States Government, did the satisfaction derived from the destruction of the complex in the Sudan outweigh the value and premium placed on the lives of innocent men, women and children on the scales of their

moral values? This matter has to be investigated so that the international community's conscience may be at peace.

About the Middle East, we are disappointed that the peace process, which gave so much hope, has virtually collapsed. This undesirable state of affairs does not diminish our faith in the peace process. We recognize the right of all peoples to self-determination. We therefore respect the rights of the Palestinian people to emerge fully as an independent sovereign State. In this context, we welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 52/250 on the participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations. We look forward to the day when Palestine joins the ranks of other States as a fully fledged Member of the United Nations.

It is the wholehearted belief of my delegation that every people has a right to self-determination. This belief inspires the Gambia's strong support for the aspirations of the 21.3 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan to exercise their right to share and participate in the activities of the United Nations. The legitimacy of their aspirations, both legal and moral, has been reinforced by similar actions and measures taken by the United Nations on the issue of parallel representation, which now stands as a useful reminder.

We believe, in the same vein, that the people of Cuba have an inalienable right to determine their destiny. The practice of unilateral imposition of sanctions by one Member State against another should end with the demise of the cold war. As we enter the new millennium, all States should be committed to shaping a better world, a world wherein all States, big or small, are equal, a world in which relations between States are based on mutual respect and strict observance of international law.

The situation between Iraq and Kuwait continues to be one of the most important issues before the United Nations. We would wish to stress the need to have this matter resolved expeditiously. We hope that those who have influence on Iraq will be able to secure its compliance with its international obligations and that it will resume cooperation with the United Nations and its bodies.

In this respect, we urge the release of all prisoners of war, including missing Kuwaiti nationals and third country nationals. We encourage sincere cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross for that purpose. We also call for the return of the properties of the Government of Kuwait, including official documents removed from their national archives.

My delegation is also concerned about the humanitarian situation in Iraq and the dire plight of the Iraqi people. We encourage Iraq to cooperate fully with the United Nations, which would end the present logjam and pave the way for a comprehensive review of the sanctions.

All of us remain concerned about the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. We believe that there is no military solution to the conflict there. We urge all Afghan factions to find a political settlement to the conflict, under the auspices of the United Nations, which addresses all the interests and concerns of all the people of Afghanistan.

Let me at this juncture reiterate my Government's condemnation of the killing of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan. We hope that the perpetrators of this heinous crime will be pursued and brought to justice.

As we approach the new millennium, we are confronted with long-drawn-out conflicts and new ones that are emerging. Our world is thus far from being a peaceful and quiet place. At this stage in our history, we must all strive to enter the twenty-first century as a united, peaceful family that can proudly bequeath to future generations a developed, secure world where democracy, justice and equality are guaranteed to everyone, irrespective of origin, race, religion or political persuasion. We hope that the Proclamation of the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, which was first suggested by the Gambia during the 1997 session, will bear fruitful results.

Apart from the numerous conflicts, old and new, my delegation is also concerned about the drug menace, which threatens the very fabric of our societies. This problem has now assumed monumental proportions, leaving no society safe from its lethal and tenacious tentacles.

We believe that all of us have a stake in this problem — big and small States alike. We must therefore join forces as a common front in our battle against this evil. The Government of the Gambia is committed to curbing the problem of drugs in its territory and will continue to cooperate with all countries in that regard.

The Government of the Gambia welcomed the twentieth special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in New York from 8 to 10 June 1998. We also fully support the Political Declaration, the

Declaration of the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction and the action plans adopted at the special session.

We wish to reiterate our concern for the growing and dangerous links between terrorist groups, drug-traffickers and their paramilitary gangs, which have resorted to all types of violence, thereby undermining the democratic institutions of States and violating human rights.

In addition to the drug menace, the international community is faced with another challenge: international terrorism. The Government of the Gambia condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. While we again extend our sympathy to the injured and to the families bereaved as a result of the recent bombings in Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa, we call on all countries to work together to fight against the scourge of terrorism.

The issue of anti-personnel landmines and its attendant consequences is of concern. My delegation welcomes the coming into force of the Ottawa treaty banning anti-personnel landmines.

With the end of the cold war, nuclear disarmament should be given priority in our efforts to ensure the safety of humankind. In this context, my delegation is encouraged by what India and Pakistan said about signing the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We join those who call for a negotiated and phased programme for the complete elimination, by all countries, of nuclear weapons.

In order for us all to enter into the new millennium with our collective vision for a better world, we will obviously need to reform and revitalize our Organization to make it more relevant and more responsive to the challenges of contemporary times. This idea has indeed taken hold, leading to the consideration of reform measures proposed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his report "Renewing the United Nations: A programme for reform".

May I take this opportunity to pay tribute to our able Secretary-General for his unswerving commitment to the reform of our Organization and his cooperation in this regard. It is our fervent hope that the success of any reform programme for the United Nations will be judged by the ability of the Organization to make a significant impact on the lives of all people, in particular those of the developing countries, as well as by real improvements in its functioning.

In this context, we feel very strongly that reform measures should focus mainly on strengthening the role of the Organization in the promotion of peace and development. Any such reform programme should address the need to enable the Organization to meet the challenges of modern times and preserve the sanctity and centrality of the principles of the Charter.

The last session witnessed a lot of debate on this issue. It is sad to note, however, that no substantial progress has been made. As we pursue this important task, we hope that the Assembly will defeat the hostile offensive which seeks to portray it as a "house of words". Any concrete and workable decisions that may evolve out of our deliberations on this issue will serve as the litmus test of the political will of the membership to forge ahead with genuine renewal and revitalization of the Organization.

No reform of the United Nations would be complete without the reform of the Security Council — the main organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. While some consensus has emerged on a number of issues on the question of equitable representation and increase in the membership of the Security Council, important differences still exist on many other issues. We urge Member States to continue to negotiate constructively on the outstanding issues with a view to arriving at a compromise that is agreeable, if not satisfactory, to all.

Finally, as we continue to grapple with the reform of the United Nations and its organs after 50 years of operation, so must we also continue to address the weaknesses, inequalities and inadequacies that plague the international economic and social system, global trade, finance, investment, international development, and so on. We must continue to do this so as to achieve more meaningful cooperation and partnership geared towards the promotion of socio-economic development and the preservation of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

It therefore bears recalling that the important issues of women in development and the rights of the child should continue to be at the top of the international agenda. In this endeavour, development must be given the priority it deserves. Africa, Asia and Latin America must be given the opportunity to emerge from their devastating past into a future which guarantees for them all the benefits of democracy and peace, respect for

human rights, development and the restoration of the dignity of all their peoples.

This objective is realizable if we all work together, drawing inspiration from the Charter of the United Nations. North and South, rich and poor, together we can do it — if we believe in it.

The United Nations provides the forum and the necessary framework to achieve the objectives that we set for ourselves on this small planet that we share. Before the United Nations was founded, the world experienced bitterly two devastating wars. When the United Nations was founded half a century ago, it helped to avoid another global war despite the cold war that ensued. Today, in this post-cold-war era in which we are confronted with localized ethnic and internal political strife, we need the United Nations more than ever before.

This world body has withstood the test of time and history. There is no alternative to the United Nations; countries big and small, rich or poor, all have a vital stake in strengthening the United Nations rather than weakening it. The United Nations is more relevant today than it has ever been, and we all should strive for its vitality and the respect of its decisions. We can do this only when it is clear in the minds of all that it is the common house of all the States of the world and that it should be perceived as being just and fair to all, in particular in the resolutions adopted by its Security Council. These resolutions should always be in the spirit of fraternal cooperation and understanding that prevail here in this General Assembly Hall.

We in the Gambia remain very optimistic, and we know we share this optimism because the General Assembly is the asylum of humanity at large against the cruelty and pain of the outer world.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, His Excellency Mr. Muratbek Imanaliev, on whom I now call.

Mr. Imanaliev (Kyrgyzstan) (*interpretation from Russian*): Allow me to congratulate Mr. Didier Opertti on his election to the important post of President of the General Assembly at this session. This is a testimony to the widespread recognition of the country that he represents. I am convinced that his rich experience and diplomatic skill will allow him to successfully conduct this session of the Assembly and deal with the important tasks before it.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Mr. Udovenko, for his fruitful work over the past year.

It would be difficult to underestimate the importance of the United Nations in the fields of peace and security, development, human rights, ecology and economic cooperation. Kyrgyzstan wishes deeply to see the Organization successfully reformed. The Secretary-General's "quiet revolution" of institutional reforms, begun a year ago, has given new strength to the United Nations mechanism.

The first, most important steps towards making this revolution a success have already been taken, but a great deal remains to be done. As the previous session showed, the process of reforming the Organization so that it is prepared to respond to the challenges of the coming millennium will require more time and more work than expected.

The reforms of the United Nations will be incomplete if they do not apply to all of its organs, including the Security Council. We judge the Council by its effectiveness. In that connection, we support the Secretary-General's proposal to expand the role of the Council. We share his view that the Council should deal with economic and social processes, which have an impact on peace and security, just as energetically as it works to resolve political issues. We also believe it essential not only to improve the working methods of the Council, but also to expand its membership. In our opinion, the quantitative expansion of the Council should take place in both categories of membership and provide for equitable geographic representation. Further, the new permanent members of the Council should have all the privileges appropriate to their status.

The difficult reform process that all aspects of Kyrgyz society have been undergoing during the seven years of our independence has yielded certain results. The main result has been the preservation of political stability, further democratization of the society and the extension of economic reforms.

Lacking access to the sea, Kyrgyzstan is seeking new transport routes, which are essential for facilitating the movement of goods, capital and services into the region. It is acquiring new information technology and electronic communications, which will help the country

modernize. Kyrgyzstan wishes to develop regional cooperation within the framework of the Central Asian economic community and the Commonwealth of Independent States. It also believes in the necessity of cooperation with other regions.

In that connection, I would like to mention the timeliness and importance of President A. Akayev's doctrine of "Silk Road Diplomacy". A revival of the idea of the great Silk Road presupposes the transformation of the area along the road into a zone of stability, security, cooperation and equitable partnership. The idea of reviving this road also represents a commitment to creating favourable conditions for increased international cooperation so that we can take joint action to solve the global problems that confront mankind at the threshold of the third millennium.

The national strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic highlights sustainable development as the basis for stable and secure human development as we enter the new millennium. The implementation of the decisions adopted at the World Summit for Social Development are of immense importance for the Kyrgyz Republic. For countries with economies in transition — countries seeking to find their way to sustainable growth — it is especially important that there be coordination and joint action within a revitalized United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and regional organizations in order to accelerate the integration of these countries into the world economy.

A priority for Kyrgyz development is solving the three-headed problem of modern times: how to promote the economy, ecology and social development. I should point out that ecology is the cornerstore of sustainable development for Kyrgyzstan. The harmony of man and nature is at the heart of the sustainable development programme adopted by the Government of Kyrgyzstan last year.

Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country; most of its territory — 95 per cent — is covered by mountains. Mountains, as is well known, are an important source of fresh water, biological diversity, mineral resources and energy, as well as being extremely important for tourism. At the same time, however, mountains means surprises and dangers. Earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, floods — all threaten human lives and require enormous financial and material expenditures. In that connection, Kyrgyzstan is deeply grateful to United Nations Member States for their support of its initiative to declare the year 2002 an international year of mountains, and we request them to continue to support the initiative at this session of the Assembly.

The Kyrgyz Republic's policy of peace, which is focused on the new trend towards a multipolar global system, presupposes, *inter alia*, a safe, non-nuclear future. The specific steps Kyrgyzstan has taken in the area of nuclear disarmament and in strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime confirm its commitment to this policy.

Appropriately, the Central Asian countries' initiative to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone was on the agenda of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. During that session a resolution on the establishment of such a zone in Central Asia was adopted by consensus.

Today it is a pleasure for me to state that the consultative meeting of experts of Central Asian countries, nuclear-weapon States and the United Nations, which took place on 9 and 10 July in Bishkek, laid the legal foundation for the Central Asian initiative. This is a new stage in the creation of the zone. In this connection, we believe it useful to continue regular meetings between experts of the regional working group and those of the nuclear-weapon States, with the participation of representatives of the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

This year's session coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Kyrgyzstan completely supports the peacekeeping efforts the Organization has undertaken in various global hot spots. At the same time, we believe that, along with peacekeeping operations, more attention should be paid to the early prevention of conflicts — so-called preventive or quiet diplomacy aimed at preventing disputes from turning into conflicts.

Kyrgyzstan is seriously concerned by the armed conflict that has lasted for almost two decades in Afghanistan. We are also seriously alarmed at the military confrontation and the grave humanitarian situation in Kosovo, the situation in Africa and the absence of progress in the Middle East, Cyprus and the Korean peninsula.

However, we are equally concerned about the financial crises in South-East Asia, Russia and Latin America and the nuclear- weapons tests conducted by India and Pakistan. For, as history shows, the sources of conflict, despite being very different, are at the same

time very similar. Armed conflicts are accompanied by violence, mass exodus of refugees, illegal trafficking in drugs and weapons and flagrant disregard for and violations of human rights. The territory of countries experiencing armed conflicts is often utilized to train professional mercenaries and terrorists.

Terrorism long ago crossed national borders and became international in nature. Thousands of innocent people have become its victims, including children, women and elderly people. Particular phenomena of the past century have been terrorist bombings and nuclear terrorism. We support the proposals for accelerating work on a draft convention to combat acts of nuclear terrorism. Kyrgyzstan firmly opposes any form or type of terrorism and calls on the international community to pool its efforts against this global threat.

Kyrgyzstan's six years as a Member of the United Nations have been a good training ground for participation in the United Nations family. Together with other countries, we have striven to establish a world of greater justice, to achieve social progress in the interest of humankind and to assert human dignity and equal rights for all.

As the twenty-first century draws closer, what the world becomes will depend primarily on our joint efforts — the efforts of all United Nations Member States.

The Acting President: I now call on the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, His Excellency Mr. Choe Su Hon.

Mr. Choe Su Hon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text furnished by the delegation*): Allow me first of all, on behalf of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to congratulate Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its current session. We believe that his rich experience and diplomatic skill in dealing with international affairs will lead this session to fruitful results. We also express our gratitude to the former President, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his successful stewardship of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. At the same time, I wish to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his efforts devoted to the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is the wish and aspiration of humankind to make the forthcoming twenty-first century peaceful and prosperous. In this connection, we believe that working out appropriate ways and means to achieve that end should be the main focus of the current session.

The next century should be one of independence. In order to build a world free of all forms of domination and subordination and to ensure equality among all countries and nations, independence should be realized throughout the world. Only when all Member States adhere to the *Juche* character and the national character and firmly maintain independence in all fields of State activities can international peace and security also be ensured.

At the first session of the tenth Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, held on 5 September this year, our people unanimously re-elected with high esteem the Great Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il as Chairman of the National Defence Committee. The chairmanship of the National Defence Committee is the highest post of the State, organizing and leading the work of defending the country and the destiny of the people, as well as strengthening and increasing the defence capabilities of the country and State power as a whole through command over all its political, military and economic forces. It is a sacred and important post that symbolizes and represents the honour of the country and the dignity of the nation.

The election of our Great Leader General Kim Jong Il as Chairman of the National Defence Committee is the most significant event in the sacred cause of strengthening and developing our Republic and in achieving prosperity and happiness for all generations to come. It is a vivid expression of our people's absolute trust in, support for and boundless loyalty to their leader.

Some time ago, our people enthusiastically celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. What pleased our people most at this emotional juncture was the fact that our scientists and technicians successfully launched into orbit an artificial satellite, Kwangmyongsong No. 1, using a multi-stage rocket carrier developed by us in our own way, with our own knowledge and 100 per cent our own technology. It was the first of its kind in the country. The successful launching of our first artificial satellite was an historic event demonstrating the might of our scientific and technical development, and it will make a great contribution to safeguarding world peace and

enriching the store of science and technology for humankind.

In the last 50 years, the Government of our Republic has been able to safeguard the sovereignty of our country, advance the socialism chosen by our people towards victory and defend peace on the Korean peninsula by holding fast to the *Juche* character and the national character, while firmly maintaining independence in all fields of State activities.

Throughout the country our entire population is now fully determined to glorify our socialism, which is centred on the popular masses, under the banner of the Republic founded by our Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung, the founding father of socialist Korea. The people uphold the leadership of the respected and beloved General Kim Jong Il. In the near future, the world will see the independent and peace-loving Democratic People's Republic of Korea develop into a prosperous Power.

The reunification of Korea and peace and security on the Korean peninsula have long been a main area of concern for the international community. From the viewpoint of both the misfortune and suffering of a nation and the peace and security of a region, the division of the Korean peninsula should not last any longer. Due to the fact that Korea has not yet been reunified, military confrontation and tensions grow increasingly aggravated between the United States, Japan and South Korea, on the one hand, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the other.

As a result of the present military manoeuvres against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on and around the Korean peninsula, there is a growing danger that either the twentieth century may close or the twenty-first century may open with another Korean war. This danger should be removed by all possible means. In order to remove the danger of war and ensure a durable peace on the Korean peninsula, the reunification of the country should be achieved without fail.

Independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity are the three principles of national reunification agreed upon between the North and the South. These principles were also welcomed and supported by the United Nations. The Government of our Republic consistently maintains that Korea should be reunified by means of confederacy on the basis of the three principles of reunification. In April this year, our Great Leader, Comrade Kim Jong Il, advanced the five-point policy for the great unity of the entire nation as part of his continued efforts for national reunification.

The main elements of the five-point policy are the principle of national independence; a change in policy by the South Korean authorities towards reconciliation and alliance with the North; dialogue for the unity and reunification of the whole nation; the promotion of coexistence, co-prosperity and public interests between the North and the South; and solidarity and coalition between the North, South and the international community. The Government of our Republic will spare no effort to achieve these points.

We have been consistently in favour of dialogue for reunification and to improve relations between the North and South of Korea. The North-South dialogue should be conducted on the basis of the principles of placing the common interests of the nation above all, removing distrust and confrontation between the North and the South and subordinating everything to the cause of national reunification. No one should be allowed to use dialogue for dishonest political purposes or to perpetuate the division of the country. If the South Korean authorities show their sincere desire for reunification by taking practical actions — such as abolishing the National Security Law and the like — we will meet with them at any time and hold dialogues and consultations to discuss the common destiny of the nation and work together for national reunification.

In order for the Korean people to resolve the questions of national unity and reunification by themselves, concerned countries, including the United States and Japan, should refrain from hindering the efforts of the Korean people. The United States Army is the main military entity in South Korea and has long been in belligerent relations with us. This is a quite abnormal phenomenon in today's post-cold-war international relations and the product of anachronistic thinking. It is the United States military entity and no other that constitutes the major obstacle in the way of the independent and peaceful reunification of Korea. In this forum, we once again strongly urge the United States to withdraw its forces from South Korea and to end its belligerent relations with us. The States Members of the United Nations should no longer claim to be unaware that the name and flag of the United Nations continue to be abused to conceal these belligerent relations.

We are convinced that the most appropriate way of maintaining peace on the Korean peninsula is to dissolve

the United Nations command in South Korea and to conclude a peace agreement between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States. This is our unchanging position.

Japan should not hinder the cause of our reunification by aggravating the tense situation on the Korean peninsula. Japan must discharge its responsibility for the Korean question by sincerely apologizing and providing compensation for its enormous crimes against our people, instead of attempting to declare war against us by drawing up so-called "emergency legislation", aimed at keeping pace militarily with the United States, the belligerent party with us.

Recently, too, the Japanese authorities behaved unreasonably when they publicly questioned our satellite launch and acted rashly in taking the issue to the Security Council, insisting that it respond to our launch. This was a flagrant mockery of the international community. If our satellite launch is a serious security concern, Japan's satellite launches should be top priority for the Security Council's consideration.

With just one year to go before the twenty-first century, the United Nations is faced with the task of building a new world free from all forms of domination and subordination. New challenges in safeguarding world peace and security, achieving the denuclearization of the world and ensuring social progress and economic development require the United Nations to find appropriate new measures.

Almost all the recent attempts by a few big countries, as opposed to the United Nations membership as a whole, to deal with international matters have met with failure. This proves that the era of power politics and big-Power arbitrary action ended with the cold war. The United Nations is now at a crossroads. It can either be dictated to by big countries or become the Organization of a new era in which the purposes and principles of its Charter are safeguarded and fully realized. The reform of the United Nations should correctly reflect this reality.

At present, the most undemocratic organ in the United Nations system is the Security Council. The current composition of the Council does not represent the general United Nations membership and the veto power of its permanent members often subverts the wishes of the majority of member States.

If the United Nations is to be democratized, the Security Council should be reformed. To this end, the expansion of the non-permanent category should be given precedence, thus correcting, to a certain extent, the current imbalance in the Council's composition. Its working methods must be improved for the sake of transparency. Priority should be given to the developing countries in the expansion of the Council's permanent membership. Any State that has failed to atone for its past is not eligible for permanent membership. As for relations between the General Assembly and the Security Council, the authority of the General Assembly should be enhanced decisively.

Recent events in southern Asia, witnessed by the entire world, remind us all that disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, should remain a priority on the agenda of the United Nations. Although several years have elapsed since the end of the cold war, nuclear stockpiles around the world have become more sophisticated rather than being reduced. When the international community called for a ban on all nuclear explosive tests, the nuclear-weapon States opted for subcritical tests.

The proliferation of nuclear weapons cannot be prevented so long as the nuclear-weapon States pursue a monopoly of nuclear weapons. The policy of the nuclear-weapon States to provide a nuclear umbrella and their double standards in dealing with nuclear issues are among the obstacles to making nuclear disarmament a reality.

The United Nations should decisively strengthen its role in the field of disarmament. In this regard, we believe that there is a growing need to convene a fourth special session of the General Assembly on disarmament.

The issue of human rights needs to be dealt with objectively and impartially within the framework of the United Nations. In today's international relations, the human rights issue has became synonymous with intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. Attempts to impose the values of one nation upon others are rampant. Consequently, the rights of people to choose and the sovereign rights of nations are being infringed. The United Nations should reject the politicization of human rights and never tolerate double standards in the implementation of human rights instruments.

The twenty-first century should be devoted to development and cooperation. Economic development and the sustained growth of the developing countries should

become a main theme in international economic relations. To this end, the current inequitable international economic relations need to be redressed and the external debt issue resolved.

Economic sanctions run counter to the ideal of cooperation, are anachronistic, and only incite confrontation among nations. Countries that see economic sanctions as an instrument of power and authority should pay due attention to the fact that many people, at home and abroad, are increasingly sceptical about and opposed to them.

Globalization has caused the monetary crisis in Asia, increasing the poverty and marginalization of the developing countries. The United Nations should find ways to meet this new challenge. It should play its rightful role in strongly promoting the spirit of collective self-reliance of the developing countries and urging the implementation of official development assistance by the developed countries.

The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea appreciates the efforts of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America to develop regional and subregional cooperation in the spirit of collective self-reliance. We also support Syria and other Arab countries in their just struggle to seek a fair and comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem and appreciate the efforts of the countries of Africa to promote peace, security and development there.

I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Governments, organizations and individuals of various countries, as well as the United Nations and governmental and non-governmental international organizations, for their humanitarian assistance with the damage caused by several consecutive years of natural disaster in my country.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is an independent peace-loving State and its Government consistently adheres to the fundamental ideal of independence, peace and friendship in its foreign policy. The Government of our Republic will develop relations of friendship and cooperation with all countries respecting its sovereignty and continue to make every effort to ensure peace on the Korean peninsula and to safeguard peace and security in North-East Asia, in conformity with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

My delegation will contribute to the best of its ability to the successful deliberation of all items on the agenda of the current session.

The Acting President: The last speaker on my list is His Excellency Mr. Mate Granić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia.

Mr. Granić (Croatia): Let me first extend my sincere congratulations to the new President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay. I am confident that his diplomatic experience will play an important role in the work of the Assembly. At the same time, I would like to thank Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko of Ukraine for the skilful manner in which he presided over the work of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

I welcome the opportunity to address the General Assembly on behalf of a nation that has emerged more vital than ever before from one of the worst regional crises since the Second World War. The free and sovereign Croatia of today harbours a vibrant market place of ideas, innovative economic and rich social and cultural practices. We are learning that democracy means the right to both rational and what at times might appear irrational choices. We are learning that the free-market economy is both a prospect for success and a risk of failure.

Positive results are already visible. Croatia of today, although still burdened by the multiple tasks of transition, reconstruction, the return of refugees and displaced persons and reconciliation, stands firmly rooted in the maturing Central European polity and economy. Croatia looks with ambition and sharpened senses towards reclaiming its place in the old Europe and contributing to the new Europe and the global community.

Since ancient times Croatia has been a European country. Integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions remains our strategic goal. Therefore, Croatia will continue to march towards it, being devoted to its high standards and committed to its principles. This year Croatia is presiding over the Central European initiative with a great sense of responsibility. Furthermore, Croatia hopes to join the World Trade Organization soon.

As a Central European and Mediterranean country, Croatia will further endeavour to remain a key agent of stability and peace in this part of the world. Through its

responsible policy towards the crisis which has marked the recent history of this part of Europe, Croatia has affirmed its indispensable role in the most important political developments in this region.

Even though the war is behind us, Croatia is still grappling with the legacies of aggression, such as the problems of devastated economic infrastructure, missing persons, ongoing assistance to war victims and invalids and the return of displaced persons and refugees. This means that my country is undergoing a double transition at the same time. The transition from war to peace is equally complex and demanding.

In June this year, the national Programme for the Return and Accommodation of Displaced Persons, Refugees and Exiled Persons was adopted, and, as everybody agrees, it is being successfully implemented. So far, more than 45,000 Croatian Serbs have returned. Croatian authorities are also taking numerous steps and measures to encourage the process of reconciliation. A successful donors' conference on reconstruction, to be held later this fall, should further contribute to the ongoing process of return and normalization of daily life, especially in the war-affected areas.

Croatia is increasingly focusing on post-war reconstruction, economic growth and development, as well as on the overall normalization of relations with its neighbours to the east and south. But it must be stressed that full normalization of relations with neighbouring countries has always been a cornerstone of our policies from the very outset.

Croatia was not only the first country to recognize Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent and sovereign country, but it has also helped Bosnia and Herzegovina more than any other party in its struggle to survive within its internationally recognized borders. Hence, let me repeat that for the Republic of Croatia as a guarantor of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the following basic principles remain paramount: first, Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single, internationally recognized State; second, the decentralization of State apparatus; and third, full equality of the three constituent peoples. Croatia cannot support any solution for Bosnia and Herzegovina that does not fully incorporate these founding principles or that in any way amounts to a revision of the Dayton principles. Deviations from or tacit abrogation of these principles can be both damaging and destabilizing not only to Bosnia and Herzegovina itself, but also to the other countries in the region.

Croatia firmly believes that the recent elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina will further contribute to lasting stability and security. The agreement on free transit through the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina at Neum and use of the Croatian port of Ploce, which will be formally signed shortly, is yet another example of good-neighbourly relations between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia has signed an agreement on the State to State Council on Cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Croatia supports the efforts by the Office of the High Representative, United Nations representatives and the peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina and shall spare no effort in doing what is in its power to help them fulfil their mandate.

We have come a long way in our bilateral relations with our eastern neighbour, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Since the end of hostilities, 10 bilateral agreements have been signed. We hope that the last outstanding issue, concerning the security arrangement for the Prevlaka area, will be negotiated promptly. Negotiations formally began on 15 September 1998. Croatia stands ready not only to open the border crossings with the Republic of Montenegro, but also to continue with demilitarization on our side of the border and with the present security regime currently administered by United Nations Mission of Observers in Prevlaka (UNMOP). Whether it is through successful bilateral negotiations with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, through the Security Council or even through unilateral action consistent with the rights and duties of Croatia under international law, the UNMOP mandate should terminate by 15 January 1999, because in the present circumstances another prolongation of the mandate can be misused to stall negotiations indefinitely.

The other United Nations mission in the Republic of Croatia, the United Nations Civilian Police (UNCIVPOL), with a mandate in the Croatian Danubian region, is approaching its final stage, after having successfully completed its task in that part of Croatia and, together with recently adopted measures by the Croatian Government, having helped create conditions for reconciliation and a comprehensive return process.

Termination of both United Nations missions will be a new landmark in the life of our country and will confirm once again its sovereignty and integrity over its entire territory.

While it has lent its full support and cooperation to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Croatia is not satisfied with its results thus far. Indictments issued so far do not adequately reflect the scope of war crimes committed by different sides in the conflict nor the level of involvement. The Republic of Croatia helped to persuade 11 Bosnian Croats to voluntarily surrender to The Hague Tribunal. Three of them have been acquitted while the rest have been awaiting trial for over 12 months, much longer than usual in any individual State. On top of that, not a single person — despite promises made as far back as the Dayton negotiations — has been charged for crimes committed against Bosnian Croats. Furthermore, only one Serb was brought to The Hague for crimes committed during the aggression against Croatia, but he died in prison and was never sentenced.

The most notorious perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity — Karadzic, Mladic and Martic — still remain at large, and in many cases in full view of the international community.

The Republic of Croatia shares the concern of the international community on the rapidly worsening situation in Kosovo and the impending threat to international peace and security. As a neighbouring country of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia is vitally interested in a speedy resolution of the crisis. We join the international community in condemning violations of human rights in Kosovo, and we denounce all forms of terrorism, regardless of whether they are committed by a State, a group or an individual, bearing in mind that State terrorism represents the most dangerous form of terrorism, due to the resources available to States. Croatia supports a peaceful and negotiated solution that would respect both the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the rights of Kosovo Albanians to autonomy. Croatia is alarmed at the imminent humanitarian catastrophe, which needs urgent and determined international action.

The twentieth century can boast of tremendous achievements in various fields on the individual as well as the collective level, while awareness of global interdependence in every respect is growing.

However, we must face the fact that we are also witnesses to the negative legacies of the twentieth century: the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; terrorism; narcotics production, trafficking and consumption; lagging development; disregard for the environment; the rise of transnational crime; and continued grave breaches of fundamental human rights and humanitarian law.

On the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, let us ask ourselves: what is the United Nations, what does it really do? I agree with those who strongly believe that the United Nations is not only a global Organization in which Governments exchange views, muster support for their policies and views or trade in votes and influence. The United Nations is much more than an Organization; it is a living idea for a better world.

Values do matter.

Like all organizations, the United Nations has aged, and its structure and mechanisms have become anywhere from slightly to grossly obsolete. To meet the challenges and needs of the emerging global society at the turn of the century, the United Nations must evolve just as quickly or risk being overtaken by other institutions or initiatives that may or may not be universal in scope, and may or may not more faithfully reflect the credo of a better world for all of us. It is high time that we again acted as "We the peoples".

It is Croatia's view that the reform of the United Nations should take many forms and focus not only on the needs of the Organization — that is, on the fulfilment of its legislative mandates — but also on increasing its effectiveness on the global stage. The Secretary-General has done his part, and it is now up to each and every one of us — as nations, as peoples, as individuals — to partake in reforming the United Nations for the next millennium.

The reform of the Security Council remains imperative. While the founding principle of the sovereign equality of States must be strictly maintained, both the structure and operation of the Security Council must be harmonized with the new realities in international affairs. Interdependence, liberalization of polities and markets and the profoundly widened access to instantaneous communication all demand that the function and use of the veto power be readjusted, and that this pivotal world body operate in a more transparent, representative and otherwise democratic structure. Croatia thus supports the enlargement of the Security Council in both categories, permanent and non-permanent, fully in line with its repeatedly declared positions.

Several important world conferences have been held under United Nations auspices in the past decade; the time has come to implement the findings and evaluate the results of those conferences.

We firmly believe that the role of the Economic and Social Council remains important to the well-being of this Organization and its Members. Although Croatia has increased its presence in United Nations expert bodies, including two commissions of the Economic and Social Council, we can do and wish to do more. Hence, Croatia attaches paramount importance to its candidature for the Economic and Social Council for the years 2000-2002.

The need for further improvement of international security structures and mechanisms deserves our special attention. If it has been identified with anything, the United Nations has been widely identified with its peacekeeping role. Nowadays, as we approach the end of the active and, by general estimation, highly successful United Nations peacekeeping presence in Croatia, the Croatian Government and people feel very strongly that the time has come for Croatia to pay back in kind some of the good deeds bestowed on us by the United Nations community. It was with a sense of pride and responsibility that I submitted a letter to the Secretary-General earlier today, formally notifying him of Croatia's readiness to join the ranks of peacekeeping contributor countries.

Disarmament and international security issues are critically important in our efforts to preserve peace and enhance stability in the increasingly volatile world.

Croatia is particularly concerned about the problem of landmines. We still suffer from the consequences of more than 2 million mines scattered all over our country during the imposed war. A lot of work has been done to alleviate the problem, but many areas have not yet been cleared. This situation adversely affects the process of return of displaced people and refugees and slows down economic reconstruction and development. The sheer magnitude of this problem requires a more forceful and resourceful global response, be it financial or technical. Croatia ratified the Ottawa Convention in May 1998 and strongly supports the efforts in the Conference on Disarmament to start negotiations on a global ban by building on the achievements of the Ottawa process.

The developments in disarmament, non-proliferation and international security since our last session can be a cause of great concern. International terrorism is another threat to security and peace in the world. Croatia joins others in unequivocally condemning all forms of terrorism, regardless of their motives or origin. Croatia also supports the strengthening of international cooperation in order to bring those responsible to justice and prevent further abhorrent acts of violence. My Government has ratified all major anti-terrorist treaties and actively participates in the current work on a nuclear terrorism convention.

Croatia joins the rest of the world in commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the past 50 years it has become obvious that we should all work hard to establish efficient mechanisms for the protection of human rights. More objective criteria must be developed for their evaluation in order to avoid politicization and establish a universal standard in human rights.

In November 1997, Croatia ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and accepted the competence of the European Court of Human Rights and the European Commission of Human Rights to deal with individual cases. Croatia has also ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Croatia welcomes the results of the Rome Conference on the establishment of an International Criminal Court, and thanks the host country, Italy, for its generous hospitality. Although not all aspirations could be fully accommodated in Rome, the establishment of an efficient, permanent International Criminal Court will be a milestone in the march towards the universal protection of human rights and the rule of law. Croatia intends to sign and ratify the Statute of the court in the near future and calls on other States to do the same.

The role of the United Nations remains of vital importance for the world today. Under its auspices, many praiseworthy achievements have been made in various fields. The United Nations has played an important role in Croatia, in time of war as well as now, when its two missions are about to complete their mandates. The United Nations presence in Croatia will continue at a level of partnership in addressing social and, especially, development questions. Only a strong and reformed Organization will be able to adequately meet the increasing and changing needs of its Member States.

In conclusion, therefore,I would like to say again that values do matter. We the peoples are capable of truly reforming the United Nations. We both need and deserve a United Nations that is able and equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

The meeting rose at 7.35 p.m.